

Act 1: Crusade and Money

Buzz, buzz, the whole street and squares erupted with noise. From the north, south, east and west, it occurred all over the continent. Places were users gathered all over the continent were stirring.

“Dammit, I really feel like cursing. Are they playing a joke right now?”

“That’s right, this is really ridiculous. We’ve been hunting level 200 monsters when suddenly level 300 elite monsters appeared around town? I lost 50% of my health with one hit!”

“If I hunt then I’m dead. How can I leave the village when I die as soon as I exit?”

“I’ve already died three times from the monsters camped in front of the village. My stats decreased by 18 points and I had to spend 50 gold on repairs. I could also only play the game for 20 minutes within three days.”

“I’d rather die a few times. I spent three days suffering on this quest only to find out that the NPC has died so I can’t complete it. Damn, I heard the quest gave good armour so I stayed all night for several days to complete it. I did all that work for nothing!”

The users gathered on the street and clamoured away. The cause of this was because of the appearance of the black obelisk. It was an unidentified object which caused fear in the NPCs of New World. However the obelisk didn’t only have an effect on the NPCs. No, in a sense the users were in an even more unbearable situation than the NPCs. Despite a virtual reality game having a high degree of freedom, the users still had to sequentially attack the enemy relative to their level. It was like a novice user starting the game with a rusted dagger only to encounter a level 999 boss outside of town. How could they kill it? It was like treading on something before it could sprout! But this absurd situation occurred in New World thanks to the appearance of the obelisks. Mobs of level 100 users appeared around novice villages and

attacked, making a mess of the hunting grounds and the village. Several villages that had been raided by monsters became ruins.

The situation calmed down a bit when troops from the Lord of each region arrived. The troops protected the villages and even destroyed the scattered obelisks as they approached. Fortunately, the situation that had suddenly deteriorated calmed to a certain extent..... The users problem started then. The obelisks near the villages were destroyed but the fundamental problem wasn't resolved. The power of the curse had already permeated deeply into the earth so the obelisks were just restored and the suspicious monsters didn't really decrease.

In this situation, the most important thing to the NPCs was protecting their territory. It was the area the NPCs lived in. In other words, the users area was different. The obelisk appeared in the hunting ground so the monsters became a lot stronger. As soon as the users left the village, it really felt like they met a level 999 boss monster. Naturally the users' dissatisfaction would run out of control. And all of the users' complaints were aimed towards Global Exos.

“What on earth are the operators doing?”

“I paused my part time job for a few days only to keep dying!”

“We can't even go outside at the moment!”

“Are you trying to make us stop playing the game?”

“I don't even get any replies to my emails.”

“This is a tyranny!”

“If it continues then I'll launch legal action against Global Exos!”

It was why their customer service and New World's home page was paralyzed. Since they had to wait to lodge their complaints, the users' dissatisfaction amplified even more. Just as the dissatisfaction reached a boiling point and the users were about to become an angry mob, a new

variable appeared. An unexpected information window appeared in front of all the users.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade (Event Quest)

Suddenly enigmatic black obelisks and unidentified monsters have appeared around the continent. A black fog and dark existences have covered the Sinius Principality.....

Currently this unlucky and confusing situation is continuing on the continent. However, this is merely the tip of the iceberg. Many prophets have warned that this is only the start of the incidents and if this continues then the worse situation will cover the continent. So the leaders of this society has decided on a crusade to defend the truth and peace.

This is a message sent to all species on the continent. It doesn't matter whether you are brave warriors with hearts of steel or saints who preach the divine will! Join the crusade and protect the future of the continent!

<Difficulty: S++ Quest Restriction: Level 250 or more>

“The Expedition army's crusade?”

The entire continent was enveloped in silence. While the users were still understanding the situation.

“Hey, look at the TV!”

“Global Exos is making an official announcement about this event!”

The users focused their eyes on a press conference that Global Exos was holding. Five days after the situation started, Ha Myung-woo appeared on the TV.

“First I wanted to apologize for the inconvenience to the users.”

Ha Myung-woo started eloquently. Then a moderator asked questions to make the interview proceed.

“Many users are asking for clarification about the situation that occurred in New World five days ago. Can we understand the reason why it took so long?”

“I’m also sorry about that point. We didn’t mean to ignore the users but we couldn’t explain until now. It is in order to provide a more interesting game for the users.”

“A more interesting game....?”

“This situation is a top secret project that our company has been planning for a long time. As you already know, it has been two years since New World started so we believe that new events are essential for the players that love New World. This is the event we came up with, where the users would join forces with the NPCs to save the continent. This event will be an opportunity for users to fall in love with New World even more.”

“Instead of solving quests they received through listening to a NPC’s concerns, it has evolved into resolving the issues of NPCs experiencing hardship.”

“That’s right.”

Ha Myung-woo answered with a confident expression.

“I can’t explain in detail but users who have checked the quest contents will probably understand the general outline. Since this concerns the fate of the whole continent, the compensation for this quest can’t be compared to others. However, this event is intended to reward users for the support they have given so Global Exos has also prepared some unprecedented prizes.”

“That sounds quite interesting? What type of prizes will they be?”

“First, this quest is huge with the expedition forces from Schudenberg and Bristania heading towards the Sinius Principality. The two users who occupy the no. 1 ranking in achievements from both forces will each be paid 500 million won.”

“5-500 million won?”

“Yes, and the two who get 2nd place will receive 300 million won and 3rd place will receive 100 million won. In addition, 4th place to 100th place will receive a cash prize of 20 million won. Users from the ranks 101~200 will be able to play New World for free for one year. Users up to the 1000th place will have a souvenir sent to them. The total prize money for this event is 10 billion won.”

“It is a truly unprecedented event. If you achieve the number 1 ranking in public achievements during the game then the rewards would be more than expected. But doesn’t that mean it is more advantageous for users with a high level? High level users will definitely have the chance to get more achievements.”

“Of course we’ve also talked about that. And we’ve decided to have a separate prize regardless of ranking or achievement.”

“Regardless of rank or achievement.....?”

“In fact, we’re looking at the ‘impact’ of the event on New World. That ‘something’ is the core of this event. The target of this event is the user who obtains that ‘something.’ The person who receives this prize will get 1 billion won and the position of Global Exos honorary advisor. That ‘something’ might be a monster or something belonging to a user working with the enemy. In other words, it 100% depends on luck.

“Amazing. But aren’t only users higher than level 250 allowed to participate in this event? New World started more than 2 years ago but there aren’t many users over level 250. Won’t users who aren’t over level 250 feel deprived because they can’t participate in the event?”

“Other online games might have events for all users but we think slightly differently. New users are important but ignoring those who have given a lot to New World isn’t possible.”

“The marketing of online games really is different these days.”

“Oh, please don’t misunderstand. It isn’t our intention to disregard new users. While the event is proceeding, the users with levels lower than 250 will still experience some problems. So when this event ends, we also planned a new event for users less than level 250.”

This was the response that Global Exos came up with. In fact, Global Exos had only come up with this plan a few hours ago. A large number of programmers and candidates had been mobilized to solve this problem but it was still an inner problem. It wasn’t something that could be announced to the public. Therefore the users had been on the verge of exploding. Then an unexpected Event Quest was triggered. Ha Myung-woo thought fiercely and combined all the circumstances with the event quest. This situation was presented as a project for the users. In addition, it was a chance to naturally get their hands on the master code. Anyway, Ha Myung-woo’s plan succeeded. The users didn’t know about the inner problems and just believed Ha Myung-woo’s words.

“I see, it was somewhat strange!”

“This atmosphere was created to arrange the event.”

“If I get first place in achievements then apart from the quest compensation, I can also get 500 million won!”

“If we find the hidden ‘something’ then we can get 1 billion won!”

Since they could gather equipment and cash in reality at the same time, the users flocked to join the expedition force. In just one day, 40,000 users joined the Schudenberg Kingdom’s expedition. There were also the 20,000 elite knights from the Schudenberg Kingdom! An expedition army of 60,000 troops were suddenly made. And there was one person behind them who was smiling complacently.....

The person with money in his eyes was Ark. Ark knew about the expedition before the event quest was triggered. It was 100% but he also knew details about the compensation thanks to participating in the meeting. The quest was ranked S++ difficult so the compensation wasn’t a joke. The top ranking achievements received a rare title, a higher rank

if they were already nobility and unique equipment. But was that all? Apart from the in game rewards, there was also a separate cash prize in reality. Normally Ark would've jumped on the opportunity. However this time was different. It wasn't the event quest rewards or Global Exos' prizes that was reflected in his eyes. The reason is that Ark was already in the expedition and he had secured the biggest rights.

'Now all the NPCs and users in the expedition are my customers!'

That's right. Ark had managed to secure the exclusive right to provide munitions for the expedition force. That was 60,000 customers!

'Even if each person pays 5 gold, that is at least 300,000 gold!'

300,000 gold! When calculating into money, it was the huge amount of 3 billion won. Rather than beating thousands of people to get the number 1 ranking, it was better to obtain the more exclusive trading rights. Wasn't it natural that the quest compensation and event cash prize wasn't reflected in his eyes?

'I've finally hit the jackpot! 3 billion won..... No, it didn't even matter if it was 1.5 billion won. To receive this kind of money..... I can buy a house, a car and put extra money into the deposit so I can live and eat!'

Ark had a rosy dream for his future like someone who won the lottery.

'Hahaha, war is indeed money!'

However, there were also a part that Ark was a little worried about. Ark had managed to obtain the exclusive rights to the supplies from Haverstein, but it was thanks to the arrangement between Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin. So it was like Ark was supported by 60% of the nobles, but the 40% belonging to Duke Sarkin were different. Anyway, the King had already chosen Haverstein as the commander. Therefore Duke Sarkin couldn't say anything else about it. But Duke Sarkin could rally his faction to oppose Ark's appointment as the exclusive supplier of the munitions. There was no way he could leave the military supplies to Ark who wasn't even a professional merchant.

‘Well, I’m being supported by Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin so hopefully a problem won’t occur.....’

When considering Duke Sarkin’s power, it was impossible to not be anxious. Moreover, the monopoly supply didn’t just have a few silvers hanging on it. It was an ideal chance to earn hundreds of thousands of gold in the next few months! If any issues appeared.....

So Ark was keenly aware of the movement of Duke Sarkin’s faction. But the problem came from a direction he never expected.

“Lord Ark.”

After organizing the troops in the expedition, Viscount Haverstein had visited Ark.

“I’ve been so busy with the applicants that we haven’t had a chance to talk properly. Are your preparations going well? If it’s you then I think it will be fine.”

‘My work? Did I have to do something? Is he just asking if I’ve prepared well?’

Ark formed a hasty conclusion and answered without thinking.

“Yes, there aren’t any problems. Everything is ready for when the expedition leaves.”

“I thought so.”

Haverstein nodded. Then he spoke with a slightly embarrassed expression.

“I was a little worried since this is the first time you’ve been in charge of munitions supply..... This is also the first time I’ve organized troops on such a large scale. So I’m relieved that you’re well prepared.”

Haverstein thought for a while before speaking again.

“In fact, the one normally in charge of the military’s munitions supply is the famous Nadin. Moreover, he is a person under Duke Sarkin’s influence.”

“Duke Sarkin?”

Wariness crept into Ark’s eyes. Then Haverstein added like he wasn’t worried.

“But Nadin isn’t the person with the position. If you’ve processed the goods without any trouble then it won’t be bad. You can go discuss with Nadin about any future work regarding munitions.”

“.....I understand.”

Ark parted from Haverstein with an uncomfortable feeling. He had an ominous feeling after hearing Haverstein’s words. In this world there were many people whose unlucky premonitions had a high chance of coming true.

“Are you Sir Ark who is in charge of munitions supply to the expedition army?”

A testy old voice spoke as he entered the office. Old people were some of the most stubborn people. Yet in the future he would have to deal with this old man regarding hundred thousands of gold. Ark pasted the smile he developed for business and greeted politely.

“Yes, I am Ark. Greetings and sorry for the delay.....”

“I don’t care about your greetings.”

Nadin interrupted coldly and threw him a scroll.

‘What the? This scroll.... Heok!’

Ark’s mouth open absent-mindedly as he read the scroll.

-Expedition Army’s Order of Munitions (Client: Viscount Nadin)

Leather: 4,000 pieces

Food: 100 tons

Steel Ingots: 200 tons

Wrought Iron Ingots: 200 tons

Wood: 200 tons.....

The scroll was the purchase order for the munitions. Ark wasn't surprised by receiving the order. However, the problem was the quantities! It was natural considering the 60,000 people in the expedition army but the quantities were a lot more than Ark expected.

"The expedition army was formed faster than expected so the time has accelerated and I need it within the next 3 days. Then please deliver the resources written there immediately.

Nadin said and gestured for him to leave.

"B-but....."

"What is it?"

"To supply these amounts in three days....."

Ark stuttered with a puzzled expression. Nadine looked at his nervous form, frowned and declared sharply.

"You can't do it?"

"No, it's not that....."

"Okay, then I will speak honestly. I'm not very happy with your appointment. I don't like how you got the exclusive trading rights because Lord Haverstein was appointed commander. But my dislike is separate from your abilities. If you have the ability to supply that amount then I won't say anything."

Nadin narrowed his eyes and continued.

"Then I'll go back to the general principles. Do you have the necessary skills required to be in charge of the military supplies? It is simple. You need to be ready with the necessary military supplies at any time. That's it. You'll be able to receive quite a bit of profit. In other words, if you want to obtain profit then you need to have at least the minimum prepared. Do you think a person who isn't prepared has any right to obtain a profit?"

Nadin's words made sense. Of course, the one hiding behind him was Duke Sarkin. The military expedition had 60,000 people so he could roughly guess the amount of supplies required. Yet Nadin required the order within 3 days. It was a way of protesting Haverstein's appointment of Ark to the position. If Ark didn't supply it then it was the same as admitting that he had no ability.

That's right. Nadin was trying to make Ark fail. But Ark couldn't say anything to Nadin. Nadin's aim was clearly Ark's failure. Of course, after receiving the rights Ark had made a plan to secure the resources. But while dreaming of his lottery win, he hadn't considered two things. The first was that the expedition would gather 60,000 people so quickly. And the second was that the initial resources needed for the early stages was different than what he thought. So he hadn't secured the necessary basic military supplies.

'This is due to my lack of experience but I can't tell anyone else.'

If he admitted his lack of experience then he would lose the exclusive trading rights.

".....I understand. I will quickly secure the maximum quantities."

Ark had no choice but to say this and leave Nadin's office.

'This is only the first order and I have to supply those required amounts. If I'm deprived of the rights then it will likely be changed to another business with the required supplies. That is probably Nadine's purpose.'

But if I succeed then I will definitely have the exclusive rights to supply the munitions. Yes, this might actually be an opportunity!'

Ark decided to think about it positively. In fact, Ark had prepared some subcontractors to supply him with the necessary goods. Weapons, armours, necessary materials and tools were contracted from the raccoons in the Underground World while the Baran clan in Seutandal provided food and various other supplies. Ark used the Sacred Branch from the world trees to check the situation in those places and he was able to get the goods for a cheaper price.

'I have to scrape as much items as possible from those two places!'

Ark immediately contacted the Underground World and Seutandal using the Sacred Branch. And he confirmed the amount of resources in the store. But even if he scraped all the resources, he could only gather 60% of the required amounts. Even if he made the production lines operate at full strength for the next three days, he would only be able to fill 70%. His concerns were becoming a reality.

"It's really crazy, if I had 10 days then I could secure the required amount..... But I can't tell the expedition that they need to wait for their supplies....."

Ark scratched his head and sighed before muttering.

".....Is that the only way?"

In fact, Ark had a solution to this problem from the beginning. Ark still had 20,000 gold from his investment funds and combined with the 25,000 gold worth of goods he embezzled from the merchant's guild, he had 45,000 gold. He could use those funds to buy the remaining 30% from other stores throughout the kingdom. However, Ark couldn't make that decision easily.

"With my exclusive subcontractors I can receive the goods for 70% of the price....."

.....That was the problem. Ark's top priority was to obtain the necessary military supplies. There was no room to consider other problems. It wasn't just Ark aiming for the exclusive rights to supply the expedition. Several aristocrats associated with Sarkin, Daltin and Halben were also aiming for it. They weren't any competition because they couldn't supply it at a cheaper price than Ark. It was a price at 70% of the market price.

"Since it is mainly products from the raccoon clan, I can purchase the items with a 30~40% discount. So even if I supply the goods to the expedition force with a 30% discount, I can still get a 5% profit. With this amount of supplies, a 5% profit is still a huge amount."

That was Ark's calculations. But if he bought the goods from other places, he would have to buy it at 100% of the price and deliver the goods at 70% of the price. It meant there would be a 30% loss from the remaining 30% goods. So Ark would get a 5% profit from 70% of the goods while he would receive a 30% loss from the remaining 30% of the supplies. If that happened then he would get a deficit of 5.5%.

"If the supplies cost 700,000 gold and there is a 5.5% deficit then doesn't that mean 38,500 gold is lost?"

Ark's face darkened at the thought. 38,500 gold! It was an enormous amount of money that would be taken away before he even started engaging in business. Even if he maintained the monopoly on military supplies from now on, there was no guarantee that he could recoup the loss. If the war lengthened and a lot of military supplies were needed then he could. But if the war ended quickly then he wouldn't be able to recoup the loss.

However.....Anyway, he had to pay the price for the amount of supplies he gathered from Seutandal and the Underground World. Even if he lost thousands of gold, he still needed the exclusive trading rights. If he lost the right then he would be ruined either way. Whether it was rice or porridge, he had no choice but to go to the end..... Still, to just lose close to 40,000 gold.....!

Ark sighed and squeezed his head.

“Ark-nim!”

Suddenly the door opened and Sid came running in.

“What? Can’t you see I’m busy now?”

Ark’s nerves were sensitive so he became annoyed easily. Then Sid murmured with a despondent look.

“But it is an urgent matter.....”

“What is it?”

“The goods we earlier salvaged from the sea. Then martial law was declared so I left it in a rented warehouse in Reuben.”

“What about it?”

“The owner of that warehouse contacted me just now. He raised the warehouse rent by 50%.....”

“What is that?”

Ark jumped and shouted. He already foresaw a loss of approximately 40,000 gold so his nerves were stretched thin. Sid was shocked and responded in a timid voice.

“That is..... You know that trade is impossible these days thanks to the martial law. In such a situation, it is also impossible to buy things from stores. Hunting isn’t comfortable anymore so users aren’t buying or selling things. So a lot of merchants are depositing goods in warehouses, causing the rent to rise.....”

“Damn! This is the thanks I get for using that guy’s warehouse? That fellow really.....”

Ark shouted until he abruptly shut his mouth.

‘Wait? Trade is prohibited so there are a lot of goods in the warehouse?’

Those words stuck in his head. After thinking for a while, Ark’s face brightened.

“Well done Sid! Follow me!”

“Huh? Huh?”

Sid was pulled along by Ark with a bewildered expression.

‘Huhuhu, as I expected.’

Ark smiled as he looked around the tavern. Ark was currently in the tavern ‘Gold Mountain’ in the merchant city of Giran. Gold Mountain had cheap and delicious food so there were usually a lot of guests. However, over the last few days it had more guests than usual. The seats were tightly packed together and some people were even standing and eating. The reason that tavern was bustling could easily be guessed from the conversation of the guests.

“This is really ridiculous!”

“If commercial trade is banned then what will happen to the merchants?”

“What is with that ridiculous law?”

The merchants gathered in groups of two or three and muttered resentfully into their wine cups. The reason they were indignant was because of the martial law declared not long ago.

-The Schudenberg King’s Emergency Martial Law!

Thanks to the unsavoury events occurring in the Schudenberg Kingdom, the King and aristocrats have declared an emergency martial law. The martial law for Schudenberg Kingdom will last until the cause is

determined and resolved.

- * Under the martial law, all checkpoints are temporarily closed.
- * Under the martial law, all quests and mission requests will be stopped.
- * Under the martial law, permission from the government offices is required in order to trade.
- * Under the martial law, acts of hostility are prohibited outside hunting grounds.

The laws which prohibited all foreign activities had been decided in the aristocrat meeting. Well, the NPCs easily accepted those laws but the users' complaints continued infinitely. They couldn't do anything even if they connected to the game. In particular, the ones that suffered a fatal blow from the martial law were the merchants. Although the checkpoints were closed, it was still possible to go outside and hunt. Even if some of them wanted to participate in the expedition, their levels were too low. However, trade was prohibited so there was nothing the merchants could do. In other words, thousands of New World's merchants were unemployed because of the martial law.

“I spent quite a bit on goods from the production district but now it isn't possible to sell it.....”

“Even with running a street stall, I can barely sell any potions.”

“I only sold one scroll today.”

The merchants sighed and complained. Most merchants bought things from another region and then sold it to general stores or the merchant's guild. Yet they couldn't do anything about those goods because of the martial law. Usually they could see to the users but thanks to the black obelisks, the number of people hunting had decreased. Furthermore, the warriors in the expedition force were quite high levelled so there was no reason for them to spend money on consumables. Therefore several unfavourable news piled on top of each other on the merchants. Thus

the unemployed merchants gathered at the tavern to express their dissatisfaction.

“Ohhh, it’s the end for me after a couple of days!”

One trade muttered with his head in his hands.

“I was trying to grab a share of the iron ores so I collected a 1,000 gold credit note from the merchant’s guild. The atmosphere had been restless these days so I thought the price of weaponry would increase. However, now there is a martial law? If I can’t obtain 1,000 gold by the time the credit note is due in two days then I’m bankrupt!”

“It is the same for me. The monsters are weird these dates so I got a credit not for a bunch of potions.”

.....That was the problem. When commercial activities were banned under the martial law, the NPCs would discontinue buying and selling goods. So the merchants in the tavern who suffered the most damage were the ones with credit notes. If a merchant with a small capital wanted to obtain the maximum profit from long distance trade, they would often obtain a credit note from the merchant’s guild. But now they couldn’t dispose of the times they bought.

Credit collection by moneylenders were horrifying whether it was in the game or reality! Under the martial law, they wouldn’t be able to pay back the credit note in time. A merchant who had a bad credit rating would receive a huge penalty and have their stats decreased. So merchants feared credit collection the most. And because of the martial law, those merchants had a lot of goods piled up in their warehouses.

“Ah, is there anybody here who would like to buy my goods?”

The cornered merchants desperately asked for someone’s help. Suddenly, somebody appeared like a ray of light to help them.....

“I need several of those things. I will purchase these items if the price is right.”

The person who said that was Ark. All of the merchant's in the tavern focused their eyes on Ark.

"Huh? You want to buy some goods?"

"Uh, what kind of things do you want to buy?"

"Well, a few things. Steel ingots, wrought iron ingots, sheet metal, wood, paper, blade sharpener, etc..... If you have any of this things then I will purchase regardless of the quantity."

The merchant's lit up at Ark's words. But the bright faces of the merchants soon turned dark again.

"However, the purchase price has to be 60% of the average market price."

"6-60%?"

"Are you crazy?"

"We used a variety of skills to travel to the mountains to buy the goods are 75% of the market price. So if we sell to you then won't we receive a 15% loss?"

The merchants muttered with an absurd expression. Ark just lifted an eyebrow and placed a bulging pouch of money on the table before speaking.

"You can tell me to go. I won't force you to sell it to me. I will only purchase these items for 60% of the market price."

Ark folded his arms and closed his eyes like he had no interest in the merchants' reactions. The merchants closed their mouths and studied each other's faces.

'Huhuhu, they can't sell it and they can't hold on to it.'

Ark inwardly smiled as he noticed the atmosphere. A lot of merchants with goods in the warehouse would choose to wait until the martial law ended. But the merchants who lacked the capital needed to pay back

their loan needed someone to buy their things. Their entire fortune was poured into the goods so they wouldn't be able to pay the rental fee for the warehouse or be able to pay off their loan. If they didn't pay their loan in a timely matter then there would be an extravagant penalty and they would become bankrupt.

'Right now those merchants don't need a lot of profit but to pay off their credit note.' Just like what happened to Sid previously, it became much harder to make a profit from gold if they were bankrupt. The higher the level, the harder it became. If they couldn't pay off the loan then they would receive thousands of gold in damages. But it wasn't easy to sell the goods right now. 'Shall I give it a slight push?'

Ark then sighed and stood up.

"I guess no one wants to trade. Then....."

As expected, the merchants flinched and hurriedly opened their mouths.

"W-wait a minute!"

"Huh? Why?"

"You're really going to act this way? A deal like this..... We need to get other opinions first....."

"I'm sorry but I don't have a lot of time. I need to meet other people as well..... If I manage to purchase it from different merchants then I won't need these things anymore."

Ark answered. But deep down his heart was anxious. The martial law was announced around the same time as the <Expedition Army's Crusade> was. In other words, they were still coping with the situation. The situation was so sudden that most users didn't understand correctly. If this situation continued for several more days then users would gradually start to cope with it.

'The people who move quickly will benefit the most.'

That's right. A lot of merchants were gathered in the tavern to complain. The ones who engaged in business with a credit note were in a difficult situation. However, the targets with some funding ability were different. Just like Ark, they used this situation to purchase goods from the merchants cheaply and then they would receive a lot of profit when the martial law ended. No, some users were already starting this type of business in Selebrid.

'My purpose is to buy things for 30% cheaper than the market price. But if another person like that appears then it will become a price competition. This is the only chance I have to get it for 70% of the market price!'

So Ark needed to somehow negotiate with the merchants. Of course he couldn't act too quickly.

"If it is 60%, our losses..... It should be a minimum of 70%....."

Fortunately, the merchants were increasingly following Ark's pace.

'I did it!'

Ark inwardly laughed as he heard the merchant's words. Ark was contracted to supply the expedition force at 70% of the market price. He wouldn't receive any damages.

"Sheesh, I'm going to stop. That guy's goal is obvious. He wants to buy things now and then sell it for a more expensive price when the martial law is over. I'd rather work hard to pay off my debt then sell it to someone like him!"

A merchant suddenly said and spat on the floor.

'T-that bastard.....!'

Ark felt his heart fall at the merchant's words. Atmosphere was important in business like this. So the merchant's words made his anxious. The atmosphere that he had spent a while creating was broken.

The merchants who were prepared to sell for 70% studied each other and backed off.

‘Damn, what do I do? Do I have to compromise with 75%?’

Ark became more impatient now that the atmosphere was broken. But if he showed a weak point then his deal would be ruined. A merchant was still a merchant. If he showed weakness then the merchants would become aware and raise the price.

‘Should I abandon this one and try again at another tavern?’

Just as Ark was thinking this.

“Wait a minute!”

A small merchant wearing a hood exclaimed from a corner of the tavern. He hesitated for a while before sighing and speaking.

“Did you say 60%? It is difficult but my situation is urgent. However, 65% is the lowest I can sell my goods for.”

“Eh?”

The other merchants were shocked by those words. Then the merchant shook his head with an irritated expression.

“Damn, do I have to give up my pride? I need 3,000 gold by tomorrow. Even if the martial law is stopped, it is no use if I have no credit and become bankrupt. Even if I have to sell it at a loss, 1 gold is better than nothing. It is 100 times better than paying the penalty.”

The merchant spoke in an angry voice before approaching Ark.

“You said you wanted steel ingots? I have about 10 tons.”

Ark nodded after hearing the merchant’s words.

“10 tons? That is quite a lot. If it is that much then I don’t need any more steel ingots. You’re willing to sell it for 65% of the market price? Since you’re selling me that much volume, I will raise it to 67%.”

“Thank you, but honestly 67% doesn’t make me feel better. However it can’t be helped. It will be too late if I sell it later.”

The small merchant sighed. But the other merchants became even more desperate. The small merchant possessed steel ingots. Since the small merchant took the initiative first, they were deprived at the chance to sell for 65%. And the other merchants were sensitive to the atmosphere. The fact that Ark bought the whole quantity meant there were less items he required. If they missed the opportunity then they would be unable to pay off the credit note, would receive a penalty and then become bankrupt. Furthermore, the small merchant also left a bold impression. The emotional merchants who were on the brink of collapse quickly rushed over.

“You said you needed wrought iron ingots? I have 1 ton!”

“I have 70 pieces of leather!”

“We have 10 tons of sheet metal altogether so will you also give us 67%?”

Therefore Ark could buy all the items from the merchants at 65% of the market price.

“Huhuhu, merchants are so simple.....”

After a while, Ark laughed as he exited the tavern. Then someone popped out from the alley near the tavern. It was the small merchant from the tavern.

“Ark-nim, did I do okay?”

The small merchant took off his hood and his face was revealed. A hobbit merchant..... He was Sid who Ark had infiltrate the tavern in advance.

“Huhuhu, you did well.”

Ark grinned and nodded. That's right. Everything that happened in the tavern was according to Ark's plan. It was difficult for a person to sell if it meant a loss, even if they had difficult circumstance. But if they saw someone suffer a loss first then the situation would change. It was human nature to follow along with others once someone did something first. So Ark had Sid infiltrate the tavern beforehand to play this role.

“Good. Now I've received approximately 80% of the quantity. I have to go to all the taverns in Giran before the rumours spread!”

“You will give me the separate 1% fee as promised?”

“I will give it once I get all 100%.”

“Then I will trust you.”

So the two con artists started looking for another tavern. After visiting 5 taverns, he was finally able to obtain the necessary amount of goods. And the purchase price was 65% of the market price. He was handing it to the expedition for 70% of the price so he could get a 5% profit.

Meanwhile, the merchants in Giran were shedding tears of blood.....

“Hrrm, you did it. You've obtained the required resources in three days. Frankly, I had been a little dissatisfied about Haverstein appointing you for this position..... You have the ability. Okay, I look forward to working with you in the future.”

Since Ark unexpectedly finished the job, Nadin couldn't say anything else. Nadine reluctantly settled the bill for the military supplies. The price for all the materials delivered was 700,000 gold! Ark received 5% of the profit so that was 35,000 gold in one transaction. However, the bill for the military supplies wasn't paid in cash. It was military currency..... It was a type of war credit that the kingdom issued in this

emergency situation. It couldn't be turned into cash but the raccoons and Baran clan were satisfied with the military currency so it wasn't a big problem.

'Anyway, I had a difficult time because of this but I also learnt a few things.'

Ark realized something thanks to Nadine and the Duke's plan. Supplying munitions wasn't just buying and providing goods. In order to accomplish his role as the exclusive supplier, he always needed to have abundant goods and a secure route to move them.

"A huge amount of military supplies is required that will cost at least tens of thousands of gold. If the goods are stolen by monsters on the way then it won't just be a monetary loss. There is a possibility that Ark's Corporation will be ruined."

That's right. Currently there was an exclusive contract between the Schudenberg Kingdom and Ark's Corporation. If he couldn't supply the goods by the due date and damage was caused to the expedition then he would have to pay a huge fine for the breach of contract. In addition, Nadine and Duke Sarkin might cause more problems. Duke Sarkin might even obstruct his operations.

"Even without Duke Sarkin's interference, there are the black obelisks everywhere. I need to secure a safe method to move supplies from now on! In retrospect, it is lucky that there is a martial law right now."

Thanks to the martial law, there was no sieges in Nagaran at the moment. Since siege warfare was discontinued, there was no reason to keep the coalition forces at Silvana. Therefore Ark mobilized 2,000 members of Dark Eden along with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members to escort the military supplies from Seutandal and the Underground World. Despite having 3,800 people, he only mobilized 2,000 to rotate the guards.

"Many alliances are participating in this expedition as it is an opportunity to gain a lot of levels. If I mobilize all the troops in Dark

Eden for the escort task then the difference with other alliance might become even bigger after the war ends. So while some people are doing the escort task, the other will train in the secret dungeon to raise their levels."

It was something he decided after thinking carefully. Despite the benefits from the war, he also had to think about protecting Silvana. So Ark made the remaining 1,800 troops remain as the guard unit for the residents of Silvana. Despite previously clearing the dungeon, the NPCs in the coalition were still relatively low levelled. Since Ark had reduced the monsters in the secret dungeon, he directed the NPCs to raise their level. Since the levels of the NPCs were important to the coalition, the users would have to protect the NPCs while raising their levels together.

"Now I've arranged the situation."

One full day had passed while he was arranging everything. Securing and moving the goods from the Underground World and Seutandal, dealing with the contract, assigning the guards from the coalition forces, sharing revenue, etc..... He needed to keep a close eye on the negotiations in order to determine if he received a profit or a loss. Since he caught the small problems, the situation was naturally arranged. Thus the 60,000 strong expedition force along with Ark started to march towards the Sinius Principality.

"Throw your chests out and walk proudly! We're the soldiers on a crusade to save the continent!"

"Oohhhh!"

At Haverstein's words, the 60,000 soldiers lifted their swords and shouted. But to Ark the soldiers were just lumps of money.

'Huhuhu, lumps of money! Yes, fight and give me more money!'

This wasn't a crusade but a war of money for Ark.

While Ark was busy with various arrangements..... A large number of people had gathered in the backstreets of Giran. They were the merchant's that had sold the goods to Ark for a loss in the tavern. Instead of shedding tears of blood, the merchants were smirking and laughing. The reason why was a small merchant standing in front of them.

“Now now! Collect the money.”

The merchants gathered around Sid who was holding a bag of money.

“2,000 gold.”

“Hmm, the fee is 3% so that is 60 gold. Thanks for the trouble.”

“Hehehe. Thank you, Sid-nim. Feel free to contact me anytime.”

The merchants collected the gold coins and left. Sid..... That's right. Sid was the one holding the money bag in front of the merchants. But why was Sid giving money to the merchants? In order to solve that mystery, we need to go back a few days.

Ark who had participated in the meeting knew that martial law was going to be declared in Schudenberg. Ark thought he knew this information before most users but he miscalculated. Sid also received the information through Ark. While Ark was busy trying to secure the rights to the exclusive trading contract, Sid was making his own moves.

‘When martial law is proclaimed, trade will be stopped and merchants will have an overflow of goods that they can't sell. If I persuade those merchants well then I'll be able to buy those goods for half the price. If I buy it and leave it in a warehouse then I can get considerable profit later!’

That's right. Sid had already devised that plan long before Ark did. While serving as the foreign division manager of the Continental Commerce Firm, he had accumulated a large number of staff in other areas.

'Huhuhu. I am a merchant. I can get the same information 100 times faster than Ark.'

As soon as martial law was declared, Sid had bought the goods from the panicked merchants for 50% of the price. By the time Ark received the information in Selebrid, Sid had already bought the items from the merchants. However, a problem then occurred.

'Damn, what is this? Isn't this situation more serious than I expected?'

It was good that he had bought the items. But he soon realized that the war wasn't going to be resolved in a matter of days. The longer the war went on, the less profit Sid would receive and he might even receive a loss instead. The reason was the rent for the warehouses. If the war dragged on then the goods would have to stay in the warehouses for a longer time. After a certain period of time, the cost of the rent would exceed the profit margin.

'The rent also went up by 50% a while ago.'

It was why Sid was upset about the increase in rental fee. Apart from Ark's warehouse, in this situation Sid's warehouse was the one that would suffer a loss.

'I will be bankrupt after 1 month!'

Sid screamed as he saw the warehouse bill. Then Ark consulted with Sid about a plan to secure the necessary amount of munitions. A idea sparked in Sid's head.

'This is great! I can sell my items to this guy!'

But if he disclosed the situation to Ark that he would clearly buy the items for 50% of the price. So Sid had the crazy idea to hire merchants and arrange them around the taverns in order to sell his goods to Ark. That's right. Ark thought he had used Sid to deceive the merchants when in fact Sid had used the merchants to deceive Ark.

'Therefore the goods that I got for 50~60% of the price, I managed to sell to Ark for 65%. Even after giving the 5,000 gold fee to the merchants I hired, it is a profit of 10,000 gold! Moreover, there is separate 1% fee that I will get from Ark.....'

Sid laughed and muttered as he mentally calculated the profit.

"War is definitely money."

Sid was becoming more and more wicked like Ark.

Act 2: Pabiun Fortress

"Steel Knights, go around the right side of the valley and attack!"

"Blackbird Knights, go around the left side of the valley and attack!"

"Units 2, 3 and 4 will break through the canyon from the front!"

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

The soldiers pulled out swords and spears and charged forward. They breathed roughly as they sank up to their knees in the snow before entering the huge canyon which looked like a scene from hell.

-You have entered the sphere of influence of the 'Jinn Demons!'

The Jinn clan are one of the rulers of hell and their presence has distorted the area. The distortion of this space thanks to the 'demonic' influence has corrupted the environment and turned it into a hell space. Naturally the demons are a lot stronger inside this distorted space.

<The abilities of all players within the Jinn Demons' sphere of influence will decrease by 20%. On the other hand, all demonic monsters will have their stats increase by 10%>

It was the identity of the black fog covering the Sinius Principality. Any soldiers that entered the black mist would instantly be surrounded by thousands of monsters. Their red eyes shone with greed and malice! They were the hellish demons that appeared out of the darkness. It was a chimera like monster with the upper body of a human, the lower body of a lion and the head of a bull. Some monsters also had 5 heads or 8 arms.....

It was similar to a monster exhibition hall. These weren't ordinary monsters but ones that had been deformed by the demonic influence. When the soldiers entered their line of sight, the monsters licked their exposed fangs with their tongues.

-Kuraka, kuraka, nohun! Arkra mojaham!

The thousands of monsters cried out and flocked simultaneously. The large number of monsters caused the ground to shake! The leaders of each unit immediately ordered their troops.

“Leading warriors, use Rush!”

“Wahhhh!”

The soldiers at the head of the unit raised their shields and simultaneously rushed forward. There was an intense sound as the two groups pressed against each other. But after a while, the enormous monsters pushed the soldiers onto the ground from above and trampled them.

“Priests, concentrate your holy power on the leading unit!”

“The great god Ares, let the power of your light help their willpower! Holy Sword!”

“Gracious Goddess of the Earth, breathe life into your children.....Revival!”

The thousands of priests in the back used their holy magic. Thanks to the thousands of holy magic, there were bursts of intense light. The

intense light caused the dark presences to moan after being blinded by the light and they hesitated.

“Now send them back into the darkness!”

The soldiers who had their health restored with holy power instantly poured a shower of violent attacks on the monsters. The monsters shrieked and ran forward. The sound of iron clashing spread through the area. Dozens of warriors ran up to the monsters over 10 metres and defeated them. But before they could even sigh with relief, they were stepped on by other giant monsters and became a bloody rice cake. The constant slaughter on the snowfield was like pouring red paint onto a white surface.

“Kuaaaa.....!”

A warrior in the middle of the battlefield moaned with distress. He was the 3rd assault captain of the 1st unit, James. He had charged in bravely with his troops when the battle began before becoming isolated after a while. Since it was the end of a long battle, his equipment had become ragged and his potions had disappeared. In this situation, he couldn't expect any help from the priests or the main forces!

“.....Is it going to end here?”

James looked around at his surroundings. In the nearby area there were only 10 people and they were surrounded by dozens of monsters.

“If I can get a few supplies..... But it is impossible in this situation. Damn, if it's like this then I just have to kill some more before dying! It is the desperate resolution of the 3rd assault captain.....!”

It was at that moment. A loud sound could be heard in the area. When James turned around, he saw one man approaching like a storm. His whole body was protected by a thick fur.

“Who are you?”

“A supply warrior!”

“Supply warrior? Shouldn’t you be in a supply unit? Don’t tell me you came here alone?”

“Yes, I’m busy so I’ll give you the detailed explanation later. Did you send a supply request a while ago? What do you need? Was it a repair tool box, recovery potions and food?”

“Yes.”

“I have 50 remaining of each item. Radun.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

The snake around the man’s waist opened its mouth and spat out 50 repair tool boxes, potions and military provisions each. James stared with shocked eyes as the man pushed something close to his face.

“Now, sign here to indicate that you’ve received supplies from me.”

“Sign? In such a situation?”

“Hurry. Shouldn’t you recover before the monsters attack?”

“U-understood.”

Once James signed the form, the man grabbed his hand and said.

“It’s hard but hold on a little more. The expedition army is currently entering the canyon. The main body has seen the signal flare that James sent a short time ago so assistance should be coming soon. It should take around 10 minutes so you have to hold on until then.”

-Roaaaaar!

Then some monsters suddenly shrieked and charged towards the man. The man turned around and shouted.

“Flash!”

The man moved around the monster like a flash of lightning. When the ray of light swept past dozens of monsters, they quickly lost 15% health. The man who showed such extreme power pulled down his scarf and laughed.

“This is a service. And I’m quite busy. Moonlight Illusion!”

A light wrapped around the man and three clones were made. When the three bodies fled, the monster shrieked and chased after it. Meanwhile, the man used Sprint and escaped to another battlefield.

“T-that person is.....”

James who had received the supplies looked at the man’s back with stupid eyes. Then someone in his unit who was also looking at the man said.

“Captain-nim, isn’t he ‘that person’ from the rumours?”

“That person?”

“What, you haven’t heard about it? Whenever a person surrounded by monsters requests supplies, that person will show up and deliver the supplies before leaving. He is called a moving shop....”

“Then is wasn’t just a rumour?”

James’s expression turned even more amazed.

‘Hihih, one more person!’

After delivering the supplies to James, the man ran through the battlefield while avoiding monsters. He would show up like the wind whenever there was a supplies request, a moving shop! That’s right. This person was Ark.

There was a reason Ark was moving around the battlefield and delivering supplies. Ark participated in the expedition as the military supplier but there was nothing for him to do once the war actually started. The raccoons and Baran clan were the ones producing the

munitions. JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and Dark Eden were in charge of moving the troops while Sid was a merchant so it was more efficient for him to handle any documents related problems. With all his staff taking care of the work, there was nothing for the president to do.

‘Then should I rake in some achievements on the battlefield?’

While he didn’t care because of the exclusive trade rights, Ark had also accepted the *<Expedition Army’s Crusade>* quest. Since Ark didn’t have to worry about the munitions supply then he should aim for the question compensation. And he participated in the battle. As the battle went on, more troops were being isolated. Those people couldn’t get support from the main army and needed supplies above anything else. However, it was realistically impossible for the supply unit to help all of them. Then Ark suddenly heard the voice of a commander in his ear.

“Damn, one of the search units has been cornered on the western mountain ridge! There are too many monsters so the supply unit can’t approach. Anyone is fine. Is there any soldier willing to deliver the supplies to the soldiers for the supply unit?”

“I’ll do it!”

Ark was searching for suitable work so he immediately delivered the supplies to the troops. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Your mission to deliver supplies to the isolated unit has been accomplished.

Thanks to accomplishing your duty, the survival rate of your allies has improved.

<Achievement +300>

‘300 achievement!’

Ark's eyes widened at the message. On the battlefield, killing monsters only gave 5~15 achievement depending on the level. Since so many soldiers gathered and attacked the same monster, most the time he could only get 1~5 achievement points. Yet he received 300 achievement points just from handing supplies to an isolated unit. Since many people needed supplies on the battlefield, it felt like a huge windfall for Ark. Anyway, Ark thought quickly after receiving the 300 achievements.

'Wait? If it is this easy to get achievements then what am I going around the battlefield for? I can just give supplies to the isolated troops. Then.....?'

Ark went to meet the supply office Nadin and said.

"A lot of soldiers are losing their lives in vain because supplies can't get there in time."

"Dammit! I already know that! But the supply unit isn't enough. In addition, the supply unit can't enter the deep places of the battlefield. If the supply unit encounters monsters will moving to the isolated troops then there will just be even more damage. I'm going crazy!"

Nadin shouted nervously. Then Ark smiled and made a suggestion.

"That's why I suggest having just one person spread supplies to the isolated unit. The places the supply unit can move on the battlefield are limited but if I'm alone then the restrictions will disappear. Well, it might be more dangerous.....but I'm willing if it is for the expedition force."

"Are you really sincere?"

"Of course. However there is one condition. Apart from the military supplies, I've also joined the expedition force. If you want me to spread the supplies to the unit then I need 120% of the market price for the supplies."

"What? Isn't that 50% more than the price you delivered it to us?"

“My life is important as well. Think of it as a danger allowance. On a battlefield, supplies are like the life of the soldiers. Even if money is important, is it more important than the lives of the soldiers fighting?”

.....Ark was shamelessly trying to profit from the lives of the soldiers. But Nadin wouldn't receive that much damages. The value of an item was determined by the need. On a battlefield it was even more important. If the supplies weren't delivered in time then they wouldn't even be worth 1 copper. If the supplies were delivered on time then 120% wasn't that expensive.

“Okay. Make sure that the unit commander signs that the supplies were received or else you won't get even 1 copper.”

“Of course. Isn't building up trust in documents the basics of business?”

Thus Ark changed from a soldier to a supplier of goods. As a supply warrior, he received quite a bit of profit. Not only did he raise his contributions more quickly than others, he was also able to receive 50% profit from the goods he handed over to the soldiers. And.....

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun who was flicking his tongue around suddenly struck. A message window appeared in front of Ark after Radun entered the snow.

-Radun has obtained 'Kalkin's Spear!'

This was another benefit he could get as a supplier. The place where the expedition and monsters were fighting was a snowfield that went up to the knee. In the confused fighting, there were quite a few places where loot was buried in the snow so soldiers couldn't spot them. While Ark was fighting along with the soldiers, he didn't have much opportunity to collect these loot. But that changed after he became a supplier. Radun could use Stalking to find items buried in the snow. It was indeed killing two birds with one stone!

“Okay. Well done Radun!”

Ark praised Radun and stroked his head after he returned.

“Master, there is a supplies request signal 500 metres away at your 3 o’clock! And another request at your 8 o’clock.”

Racard suddenly communicated to him.

“Which side is more urgent?”

“Although the signal appeared later, the 8 o’clock direction is more serious. There are a lot of soldiers who survived but their weapons are so tattered that it will break any minute. Some of them are already weaponless and only have their shields left.”

“I understand. I’ll move in the 8 o’clock direction. Direct me!”

“The right side has reinforcements on both sides so the battle is extremely crowded. There is a gap in the rocks with a path to escape approximately 200 metres from where you are. If you go around where the monsters have already been taken care of then you can get there within 3~4 minutes.”

“Okay, tell me if there are any changes!”

Ark ran across the battlefield while receiving Racard’s real time traffic reports. This contributed to how he could be a supplier by himself. Racard had a panoramic view of the battlefield and he could also use satellite surveillance mode to catch the supply requests quickly. His directions also allowed Ark to move to the troops quickly and safely, so his mobility couldn’t be compared to the supply unit. Sometimes he even delivered the supplies faster than the supply unit who were right beside him.

‘I have to arrive first in order to receive 120% of the price!’

So he focused on mobility but that wasn’t everything.

‘It is also important that the soldiers survive. I can’t delay at all!’

So Ark had to go a little bit faster even if there was more danger. It wasn't just because fellowship between soldiers were common in war movies. All the soldiers in the expedition were Ark's customers. If his customers decreased than wouldn't his income also decrease? The soldiers had to survive and fight for a long time in order to gain the maximum profit. Of course, the expedition's ultimate premise was to save the continent. If the expedition forces were destroyed then Schudenberg Kingdom would be in danger.

'The survival of the soldiers is important to me!'

"Thank you. The 4th unit is moving here so just hold on for a bit."

Ark once again explained the war situation after delivering the supplies. This was an effort to raise the survival rate of the soldiers. Just as he was turning around to go fulfil another supply request.....

"Gripper! The Gripper unit has appeared!"

The shout came from their military camp. He turned his head and saw some enormous shadows appearing in the canyon.

Clink, clink, clink.....

The giant shadows were over 20 metres big and dragged chains which made a metallic sound. With their eyes and mouths sewn shut and chains wrapped around the body, the monster called Gripper appeared carrying huge stone pillars. As soon as they showed up, the allied camp fell into a state of chaos.

"Block them! Stop those guys before they get here!"

"Concentrate all large weapons on the Grippers!"

"Simultaneously fire flames and electricity to stop the Grippers!"

Hwiiiiing, tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

At the same time, several shots of flames were fired from something which looked like a beehive in the allied camp. It was the weapons that

the raccoons had developed. Naturally Ark had sold the next generation of weapons to the expedition force. Numerous catapults as well as Fire Barrage Crossbows were sold. The stones from the catapults flew across the space and slammed into the Grippers.

-Kuaaaa!

When hit by dozens of projectiles, a Gripper made a strange sound and knelt.

-Bakuram, bakuram, puraibata, bakuram!

When the Gripper fell, the armoured unit and cavalry unit gathered around it. Of course the rest of the expedition army didn't just sit and watch. All the troops marched forward and created a barrier consisted of several layers of the armoured unit to prevent the onslaught from monsters.

"Armoured unit, attack without stopping! Do whatever it takes to stop those guys!"

The commanders shouted again while the large weapons fired a volley of projectiles. Two Grippers collapsed from the tremendous firepower. In the meantime, several troops were destroyed by the violent attacks from the monsters. After three consecutive attacks, the Grippers managed to arrive at the place where the troops were.

-Kuaaaa!

A Gripper raised the stone pillar and swung it down vertically. The 10 metres long stone pillar became stuck in the ground. Then the Gripper who planted the stone pillar in the ground scraped the skin of its chest with its claws and tore out its heart. The Gripper howled into the sky before its body was blown apart like a bomb. Ark, the soldiers and even the monsters were hit by the shock wave. When he raised his head, an information window was floating in front of him.

-The Gripper has invoked the 'Earth Blast'!

The Gripper has sacrificed its life and used the huge stone pillar to spread the impact of the curse through the earth. Those who receive the impact will be deprived of their power and won't be able to oppose any more evil spirits. Those who receive the impact will take 24 hours to recover their power. Meanwhile, the evil curse will strengthen the demonic influence within 2 kilometres and the monsters will become stronger.

<NPCs and users will have their abilities decreased by 50%. Monsters with the demonic influence will have their abilities increased by 50%.

Duration: 24 hours>

“Ack, again.....!”

“It is vexing but there's no more hope!”

The commanders moaned as Earth Blast was used. All allies had their stats decreased by 50% while the monsters had it increased by 50%. In other words, there was now a huge difference between the soldiers and the monsters. Fighting in these circumstances was suicide. The expedition army had only one choice left.

“Retreat! All troops retreat!”

The Schudenberg expedition was forced to retreat. Deep inside the canyon they retreated from was a huge fortress engulfed in darkness.

“Dammit!”

Haverstein yelled as he slammed his fist onto the table. After the Earth Blast from the Grippers, the expedition force had immediately retreated from the canyon. But retreating from the battlefield wasn't as easy as it sounded. Thanks to the Earth Blast, there was an incredible gap between

the abilities of the soldiers and the monsters. Around 1,000 people were killed before they could retreat out of the range of the demonic influence.

“How many more soldiers do we have to sacrifice?”

Haverstein bit his lips as he stared at the commanders gathered in the tent. The question wasn’t directed towards them but towards himself. In order to understand why Haverstein was made, the situation needed to be explained.

After 10 days ago, the Schudenberg expedition had finished all their preparations and departed towards the Sinius Principality. While marching and destroying the obelisks, they finally arrived at the Schudenberg border after a week. Although they hadn’t initially planned for such a quick march, the darkness had encroached on the continent quicker than expected. When the expedition force left Selebrid, they heard information that the darkness was pushing against the border region. When they arrived, the darkness was already encroaching on the northern region of Schudenberg. They could no longer blindly enter the Sinius Principality. Haverstein’s response was to divide the expedition army into several troops.

“If the expedition army enters the Sinius Principality then the troops protecting Schudenberg will vanish. So 30,000 troops will use this place as a base point and destroy all the obelisks in the northeast and northwest to prevent the darkness from spreading. The rest of the 30,000 troops will enter the Sinius Principality and meet up with the Bristania expedition at the promised location.”

So the war between the expedition forces and the dark army began. But there was one difficult part about this. The border region between the Schudenberg and Sinius Principality was filled with mountains. The mountain range was famous for its steepness so only a certain number of troops could travel through it. The only possible way to lead the troops across the border was through Pabiun Canyon. Since the relations between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality had been hostile for a long time, they had built an impregnable fortress in the Pabiun Canyon. It was Pabiun Fortress that was annoying Haverstein right now.

“For mere monsters to occupy and use Pabiun Fortress.....!”

At first Haverstein had thought there were no officers in charge of the monsters. However Haverstein belatedly realized his mistake after entering the canyon.

‘I’ve never seen so many monsters emerging from the fortress in waves.’

Previously the monsters haven’t used strategic fighting. The monsters must be stationed at Pabiun Fortress in order to stop the Schudenberg expedition.

“They’re obviously under someone’s control.”

“Yes, the battlefield looks chaotic at first but important moves are actually being made. It is impossible for the battle to progress like that without someone commanding them.”

Someone said with a concerned expression.

“Then someone has emerged from the darkness to take control? To be able to control so many different types of monsters.....Don’t tell me the Dark Lord has been resurrected?”

The unit commanders’ faces turned pale as they heard the words ‘Dark Lord.’ Dark Lord was a word which had a type of destructive power to the NPCs of New World. Of course, there were also NPCs with common sense who didn’t suffer from those words.

“The situation would be a lot worse if the Dark Lord was revived.

The Dark Lord wouldn’t be concerned with stopping us here and there are still the black obelisks.”

Haverstein unrolled a map and pointed a finger towards Pabiun Fortress. Dozens of triangle shapes were drawn in the spot he indicated. The main difficulty in capturing Pabiun Fortress was the ‘Black Obelisk Forest.’ The person who discovered the Black Obelisk Forest was Ark. The expedition army had killed 20,000 monsters during

the week they spent here.....it was similar to the number of monsters confirmed at the fortress. But as the battle continued, the number of monsters was the same as before. Haverstein had thought it was strange and had scouts infiltrate many times but they couldn't find any information. However, Ark had accidentally stumbled upon the reason when using Racard to survey the terrain.

Several kilometres on the other side of the fortress was a huge number of black obelisks. It was the Black Obelisk Forest. That's right. There were 50 obelisks on the other side of the fortress. The black obelisks had the function to resurrect monsters like the Quartermaster for users. It was why the numbers didn't decrease no matter how many monsters were killed. In order to capture Pabiun Fortress, they needed to destroy the black obelisks. But they had to pass through the fortress in order to get to the black obelisks. Then the only remaining method was to wipe out the monsters before they could resurrect again.

Haverstein had used various strategies to capture the fortress during the week but it was useless. The Grippers would appear whenever there was a crucial moment. And the duration of Earth Blast was 24 hours. While the expedition retreated and waited for the skill to finish, the monsters would be restored. So despite fighting without breaks for one week, the result was just a standstill.

“Should we recall the 30,000 troops that we sent to the other areas?”

A leader expressed this opinion but Haverstein shook his head.

“Pabiun Canyon is a long and narrow terrain. Even if there were more troops, the number of soldiers that can actually engage with the enemy is limited. In addition, the monsters can be spawned in other areas covered in darkness and we can be attacked from behind. It's because we can't predict where the black obelisk will appear.”

The leaders once again started worrying at Haverstein's words.

‘It doesn't matter to me.....’

Ark was the only exception. No, the current situation for the expedition force was Ark's ideal circumstances. Unless they captured Pabiun Fortress, the expedition force couldn't enter the Sinius Principality. The war would have to continue. And war was just a battle of attrition. The number of military supplies that Ark could sell would grow.

'Moreover, the battle over Pabiun Fortress is just a skirmish. From the expedition leaders' point of view, it was unreasonable to risk the expedition on a skirmish. So to reduce as much damage as possible, they would have to invest more in potions and supplies.'

But there was even more. This battlefield wasn't in Schudenberg Kingdom. After the expedition force entered the Sinius Principality, the supply lines would become longer and more risky. But Ark had a somewhat secure way to transport supplies. In other words, he could provide a lot of munitions supply safely. If the route was short then he could reduce the expenses.

'If this state is maintained for a few months then my business can become a conglomerate!'

In fact, Ark had initially wished for a quick resolution to this situation. If the martial law was over then his triangular trade route could resume. But after observing the situation for a week, he had changed his mind. Every time the expedition fought against the monsters at Pabiun Canyon, Ark received an income of at least 2,000 gold. This level of profit was higher than what he would receive from the triangular trade that was just beginning.

'Well, I want the war to continue as long as possible but.....'

Ark was eating up money from the Schudenberg treasury.

'Although the kingdom might be lacking a bit of money, this much won't make it go bankrupt.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Commander-nim, I just received an urgent report!"

A messenger plunged into the tent with a desperate expression.

“What is going on?”

“Yesterday evening, the Bristania expedition arrived at the southwest border of the Sinius Principality. The monsters were caught off guard by a surprise plan and they successfully defeated them in the Sumire Mountains. Now they are advancing to meet us at the Silrinad area!”

“Already?”

“Is that true?”

The leaders looked surprised by the messenger's report.

“Yes, the Bristania expedition has 80,000 people. That's why they departed later than us. And they also have the foreigners who spearheaded the surprise attack, the warrior Bread and the female magician Redian.”

“.....That is a problem.”

Haverstein and Ark both muttered as they received the information. Despite saying the same words, Ark had a different meaning from Haverstein. The reason Haverstein said it was trouble was because the expedition was a joint initiative between the two kingdoms. They had left first yet the Schudenberg army was still stuck at the border. But as soon as they entered the war, the Bristania forces were already advancing to the Silrinad area beyond the border.

This in itself wasn't bad news for the Schudenberg expedition. The two kingdoms decided to meet at Silrinad because it was a strategically important area. If the Bristania expedition occupied the area then they could attack behind Pabiun and destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. Then the Schudenberg expedition could enter Pabiun Fortress with minimal damage. But it wasn't good to receive help from Bristania at such an early stage. When the war in the Sinius Principality was over, then Schudenberg kingdom would have to give a large amount of the compensation to Bristania. The biggest goal of the expedition was to

repel the dark forces so they had poured huge amounts of money into it. Since Haverstein was the commander, he had to pay attention to that part. But Ark was worried about a different problem.

'I assumed that Bread and Redian were in the expedition after they didn't contact me for a while. Damn! They got in the way.....'

Ark muttered inwardly as he bit his lip. Once again, Ark would continue to receive a huge benefit if this current state continued. But that balance was broken with the entry of the Bristania forces into the war. It was impossible for him to be happy about it. Ark was simply greedy. But after that his thoughts were the same as Haverstein's.

'We can't stay at the border forever. I can only change the military currency to cash after the war ends. But if the war persisted then the Schudenberg Kingdom has to set the tone for the war.'

It was important that Haverstein and the expedition force takes leadership in the war. The two expeditions would eventually join together.

'If the Bristania expedition takes leadership then the Schudenberg forces might not get the chance to come forward. In the worst case scenario, the Bristania might use their supply unit to spread goods!'

This was the part Ark was worried about. Both kingdoms were going to get significant gains from entering the Sinius Principality. The expedition force that had more achievements would be able to request more compensation. If the Bristania expedition took leadership then they wouldn't give as much chances to gain achievements to the Schudenberg army. They would intentionally remove them from important battles.

'If the Schudenberg forces don't fight fiercely then how much supplies will they consume? If the chances to fight decreases.....'

It would mean less consumption of supplies. That meant his income would decrease. Ark had gone through all that trouble to secure supplies from the Underground World and Seutandal. He even set up 24

hour production lines to secure a significant amount of goods. So far the consumption had been perfectly balanced with the production. What would happen if the consumption suddenly plummeted? And the war ended before he disposed of all his stock? In the worst case scenario, Ark would have goods worth thousands of gold to dispose of.

‘A-absolutely not! If all my funds are tied up in the goods when the war ends then it would take a long time to resume the triangular trade!’

But the problem didn’t end there.

“There.....and a command has also been sent.”

The messenger hesitated as he looked at Haverstein.

“What is it?”

“If the Bristania expedition arrives at Silrinad first and takes away the leadership then the nobles will have to appoint someone else to replace you as commander.”

Ark felt his heart drop at the words. Replacement commander? What kind of talk was that?

‘It must be Duke Sarkin who planted the idea. Marquis Halben and Daltin recommended Haverstein so it is impossible for them to mention replacing him. If Haverstein is replaced then it would be with Duke Sarkin’s candidate. Then.....’

The reason Ark could receive the exclusive trading contract was because Haverstein was the commander. If Haverstein was replaced then Ark would also be replaced as well. Duke Sarkin was the one who tried to make Ark fail before the expedition departed. Wouldn’t Duke Sarkin have one of his subordinates replace Ark? Then it wouldn’t simply be the problem of selling his remaining stock. Currently Ark had goods worth hundreds of thousands of gold piled up and if he couldn’t sell them then Ark’s Corporation would become broke. That was Ark’s thoughts.

“Even this will be taken away.”

Haverstein muttered with a bitter smile. Then the leader of the 1st unit said with a dissatisfied look.

“It’s really frustrating. They don’t know about the battlefield conditions. The Bristania border is completely different from ours. Their mountains have a gentle slope so they can easily move a large army. The black obelisks are also easier to destroy then. They only see the results yet they still want to replace the commander.....”

“It is ineffective even if we say that.”

Haverstein spoke in a calming voice.

“We can’t worry about the decision from the meeting now. The biggest purpose of this fight is to repel the dark forces. But repelling the forces is only 50% of our work. Like His Majesty said, this battle doesn’t just involve the Schudenberg Kingdom but the continent as well. If Bristania grabs the early initiative then we have to cooperate with them.”

“That is true however.....”

“Although the Bristania army crossed the border, it will take them 5 days to reach the Silrinad area. We’ll just have to capture Pabiun Fortress in a few days. So our problem is to think of a way to capture Pabiun.”

But it was impossible for that to happen. In the end, the leaders could only sigh as they left the meeting. The expedition army couldn’t enter the canyon until the effects of Earth Blast wore off the next morning.

‘Is there another way?’

“Hey, why does your face look so down?”

He suddenly heard a familiar voice from somewhere. When he raised his head, he saw with surprise that it was Shambala.

“Eh? Shambala? Why are you here?”

“Eh? What is with that ‘eh?’ Aren’t you the one that called me?”

“Me? Ah, that’s right!”

Ark made a stupid expression before belatedly nodding his head. He had forgotten that he summoned Shambala thanks to this incident. Ark had called Shambala not long ago. After becoming a supplier, Ark knew how much profit there was in supplying goods to soldiers on the battlefield. And he came up with an idea to maximize the profits.

Not everyone could become a supplier like Ark. They had to be able to evade thousands of monsters while running around the battlefield. So a certain level and capability was needed. The person who came to Ark’s head at the time was Shambala. Shambala was a user who had the same extraordinary skills as Ark. He could go around the battlefield and sell supplies like Ark. Ark immediately contacted Shambala after coming up with the idea. However Shambala’s personality wasn’t the type to willingly go along with Ark.

“You eat too much.”

Shambala had refused as expected. But Ark had one way to get Shambala to agree.

“Hmm, is that so? Then I will use the ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon. Surely you won’t break your oath in front of Isabel?”

“.....You bastard!”

Shambala regretted it but it was already too late. Ark had received a ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon. Shambala has issued this coupon to Ark because of Seutandal. While the black obelisks had appeared on the continent, they still hadn’t showed up in Seutandal. But it wasn’t completely free from the threat of the black obelisk. There were various black obelisks in the neighbouring waters so sea monsters had begun attacking Seutandal. That was a serious problem for Ark as well.

"We would like to produce the munitions and industrial material that Ark-nim requested. But the sea monsters are invading continuously so there is no time to make them."

Isabel said when Ark visited with the contract for munitions. But the production capacity of the Baran clan was indispensable to Ark's plan. Yet it wasn't possible to produce the goods because of the sea monsters.

'Is there a way to stop the sea monsters?'

Ark was busy contemplating when an item entered his head.

-Parasite's Egg Sacs

The egg sacs of the Parasites living inside Leviathan. They will hatch once placed underwater.

He had been unsure about where to use such an item. Even if they were hatched, they were still monsters. Wouldn't he also have to raise their levels after they hatched? But this item was unexpectedly useful when combined with the special ability of the Baran clan. The 'monster taming' ability of the Baran clan! That's right. Couldn't the hatched parasites be trained by the Baran clan to be used in the military? Plus, the Parasites were just hatched so they would be easy to train. Then the thousands of Parasites could join the Seutandal navy. No, one egg sac could hatch thousands of eggs so the navy could have tens of thousands of trained monsters.

'The number of Parasites hatched could deal with the sea monsters. Then the Baran clan will be able to concentrate on their production.'

So Ark made a bargain with Isabel as soon he made the plan. As expected, there really were no useless items in the game. Ark would provide a method for Seutandal to deal with the sea monsters and the price for the war materials would be 65% of the market price. Shambala who had been watching Ark snorted and muttered.

“You really are an unpleasant fellow.”

But his words dug his own grave. Ark immediately added another condition.

“65 percent of market price for the military supplies.....and a ‘1 time Shambala use’ coupon in exchange for the Parasite eggs.”

“What? Am I a thing?”

Shambala jumped with surprise but he inevitably agreed once Isabel looked at him.

“Kikiki, be careful in the future.”

Ark laughed at Shambala who looked like he wanted to kill Ark.

He had carelessly forgotten about the coupon being used so Shambala frowned and shouted.

“Ah, that’s right? Are you playing with me now?”

“Shut up, I’ve been busy so I forgot for a moment. I can’t afford to quarrel with you now. Damn, the slightest slip and the military supplies.....”

“What’s the matter?”

Then a woman walked out from behind Shambala.

“The problem? Nothing. Just.....eh? L-Lariette-nim?”

Ark flinched and closed his mouth. The woman who had appeared from behind Shambala was Lariette. Shambala saw Ark’s face and instantly smiled.

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? We left together after you contacted me. Well, it is good. Since you have women assisting you everywhere. How about it? Aren’t you thankful?”

‘This guy.....!’

Ark glared at Shambala. In fact, the situation between Ark and Lariette was quite stressful these days. Many times he had thought about having a serious talk but he had been too busy. And Lariette had also noticed Ark’s thoughts. So it had become increasingly awkward whenever they met. The fact that Shambala took her along.....

His intention was clearly to discomfort Ark.

“Is it a problem that I came?”

Lariette noticed their expressions and said. Well, it was a problem. A large one. But how could he say those words in front of a woman?

“Is there such a thing? I’m just happy since it’s been so long since we’ve met.”

Ark answered with an obviously awkward expression. Therefore the atmosphere quickly cooled. Shambala was trying to hold back his laugh that he was close to tears. Since the atmosphere was quite uncomfortable, Lariette quickly changed the subject.

“But what were you saying before?”

“Before? Ah, that’s right. Actually.....”

Ark remembered and quickly explained the situation with the expedition. Shambala erased his playful expression and spoke in a serious voice.

“Hmm, it doesn’t seem to be going as well as I thought.”

“It’s not going well. Haverstein will lose his position after a few more days. Then I will lose my exclusive trading contract. This isn’t a situation where you can also stay calm. If I go bankrupt then Isabel will have to bear the costs of the stockpiled materials as well.”

“If that happens then my sword will always be aimed at your back.”

Shambala raised an eyebrow and spoke in a bloody voice.

“Are you really going to act like that? When your friend might be going bankrupt?”

“Can I really call you my friend after those words?”

Ark and Shambala started to argue with each other. Lariette who seemed to be pondering something carefully suddenly asked.

“That....if you can’t attack the fortress from the front then how about striking from behind?”

Lariette’s words stopped Ark and Shambala’s argument. Then they both sighed and shook their heads.

“That.... If it was possible then we wouldn’t be worrying.”

“If you look then you’ll understand. The mountains are blocking the border between the Schudenberg and Sinius kingdoms.

The only way is to pass through Pabiun Canyon.”

“Isn’t there another route that crosses through the north of Pabiun Canyon?”

Lariette asked. She looked through her memories before explaining.

“I don’t remember correctly since it was in the early days when I started the game. Um.....While I was playing with some other candidates, I received a quest to find a hidden dungeon in the Sinius Principality.”

She avoided mentioning names but it was the days that she played with Alan. But in those days it was impossible for users to cross the border checkpoint. So Alan had paid a considerable amount of money to a minstrel in a tavern for information on how to cross the border. It was a secret route which bypassed the Pabiun Fortress.

“Therefore it was possible for me to enter the Sinius Principality with my colleagues.”

“Please explain more!”

Ark said as he suddenly grabbed her hands. But he quickly became surprised and removed his hands.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“Ah, no.”

Lariette blushed at Ark’s reaction and avoided his eyes. After seeing the atmosphere between the two people, Shambala smiled and whistled.

“It was worth bringing Lariette along intentionally.”

Act 3: Smuggler’s Pass

Hwiiing!

Cold wind raged around the valley like a piece of ice. Snow was piled up from a snowstorm that ended a while ago but the wind blew it everywhere like a storm. In the midst of this white storm was a black wolf.

“Phew.....”

The black wolf, also known as Ark, sighed.

“I expected it but this really is no joke.”

Ark said as he looked at the area where he had to cross. Ark was currently in a deep valley halfway up a mountain. He was also grabbing protruding stones on a cliff like someone rock climbing. It wasn’t just Ark stuck on the cliff. Shambala, Lariette and 200 chosen people from the expedition force wearing thick fur followed Ark. All of them were using gear to grab the protruding rocks. But recently those protruding rocks couldn’t be seen at all.

“We can’t move this way anymore.”

Ark examined his map and the surrounding terrain before shaking his head. Then he turned his eyes to a cliff opposite him that was dozens of metres away.

“Racard, check the cliff on the other side.”

“Okay.”

Racard emerged from Ark’s thick fur from changing into Dark Wolf. He flapped his wings and flew to the other cliff before returning after a while.

“I checked it. There is a way to move down on the opposite cliff.”

“I’m glad. I was worried we would have to turn back. Shambala.”

Ark turned around and grabbed the rope that Shambala pulled out of his bag. Ark then tied the rope firmly to a stone nearby and gave the other end to Racard.

“Find a suitable rock on the other side and tie it firmly.”

“I understand.”

Racard flew to the other cliff while holding the rope. The snowstorm was intense and he couldn’t check it fully but the rope stretching between the two cliffs seemed to tighten. And Racard immediately flew back.

“That’s it. I tied it firmly so it won’t come loose.”

Ark pulled the rope several times and confirmed the weight that could be safely held by the rope. There was a loud roar in the distance. The winds that blew in the valley were so rough that anything would shake. No, if it was already a different rope then it would’ve probably already been broken. However, the rope Shambala carried was a magic item with high durability so it didn’t break that easily.

“It is windy so only 1 person should move at a time. I’ll move to the other side first to check it out.”

“Yes, please be careful.

Lariette blew out a white breath as she replied. Ark nodded before using the rope to move to the other cliff.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

It happened when he was 2/3rd of the way there. All of a sudden the entire mountain seemed to shake.

“Again! Everybody stick closely to the cliff!”

Shambala shouted as he clung to the cliff. In fact, this was a snow covered mountain and light earthquakes occurred a few times. But even a light earthquake was a tremendous threat to the people on the cliff. Small stones falling from the cliff above them could deal huge damage. Dozens of people without any rope had previously been hit on the head and lost their lives. But fortunately that unhappy accident didn’t occur this time.

“Phew, we survived that one.”

Ark holding onto the rope as well as Shambala, Lariette and the 200 troops sighed with relief. However, this time the problem wasn’t the rocks falling from the cliff.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

“What the? There’s no shaking so where is this sound coming from?”

Ark tilted his head to one side and looked at the cliff. Shambala who was surveying the area paled and cried out with a stricken look.

“Ark, the valley!”

Ark reflexively looked and he also paled like Shambala. A huge tidal wave was pushing through the valley at tremendous speed towards

Ark. The huge tidal wave consisted of snow and rock! That's right. The snow piled up on the upper reaches of the valley had collapsed, causing an avalanche. Ark who confirmed the avalanche quickly moved his eyes to the other side of the valley. It would take at least 3~4 minutes to reach the other side of the valley. That was enough time for Ark to be turned into finely minced meat.

"Damn, it's already late! Everybody climb up as much as possible before the avalanche hits!"

Shambala shouted and the soldiers quickly ascended the precipice with their gear. However, Ark who was dangling from the middle of the rope stared blankly.

"Oh my god, the destination is right in front of my nose.....!"

A voice filled with exhaustion flowed from Ark's mouth. Ark thought back to yesterday evening when he had received the information from Lariette.

"Please explain more!"

The scene had returned to yesterday evening when Ark had grasped Lariette's hand. Ark quickly dropped his hands and the two people blushed.....

Anyway, Lariette explained the secret passage in detail.

"The minstrel called it Smuggler's Pass."

"Smuggler's Pass?"

"Originally smugglers use this pass to move items between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality. So it was called Smuggler's Pass."

"Anyway, it is possible to go beyond Pabion Fortress using this passage?"

“Yes. I guess but.....”

Lariette sighed as she looked through her memory and shook her head.

“I said that but I don’t remember too well.”

“You don’t remember? What?”

“It’s been two years since I’ve gone through that path so I don’t remember the whole way. It was also summer when I went through there. The path is also quite steep so at least 20 of my colleagues had died. The minstrel said that Smuggler’s Path is a dangerous place where the smuggler had to risk their lives. I don’t know what it will be like in winter.....”

“That isn’t a problem.”

Ark said with flames in his eyes. If the Bristania expedition took the leadership then Haverstein would be replaced as commander. Then Ark’s monopoly rights would fly away. Ark would have a huge amount of stock and go bankrupt. It wasn’t simply the game that he would become bankrupt in. He would also become bankrupt in reality. It was a problem with his life at stake! He had to do everything possible to pass through Pabiun Fortress. He couldn’t hesitate in the game just because there was a risk of dying.

“I’ll take care of the rest so Lariette-nim should just tell me what you remember.”

Ark listened to Lariette’s expression and indicated the location on the map of the Albana Mountains. Ark was able to figure out the approximate route of Smuggler’s Pass.

‘But I can’t just go there blindly with only Lariette-nim’s words. I have to gather information about the surrounding terrain.’

“Summon Demon, Racard!”

Ark gave the map to Racard and said.

“Check the terrain carefully and mark any difficult spots on the map.”

“What? You want me to fly around the freezing snowy mountains?”

“If you complete this well then I’ll give you one holiday whenever you want.”

“Really?”

“This is important.”

“Understood!”

Racard flew towards the mountains with an expression filled with desire for a holiday. Ark’s life was valuable so he needed to check the route meticulously. If Ark died several times then he could recover the stats lost. But if he incurred a debt and became bankrupt then he wouldn’t be able to recover. That’s why Ark meticulously checked everything despite not having much time. It was quicker than having to turn back several times. Once again, Ark would become bankrupt if the Bristania expedition was in charge. And the time remaining was 6~7 days. If the Schudenberg expedition captured Pabiun Fortress in 2~3 days then they would take a few days to move to the Silrinad.

‘The expedition could use the Smuggler’s Pass to capture Pabiun Fortress. The problem is that there are only four days left. If a problem occurred on Smuggler’s Pass then everything would be finished. There is only one chance. Despite the urgency in my heart, I have to collect as much information as possible to increase the chances of success.’

This was Ark’s judgement. So he impatiently waited for Racard to return. After 12 hours had passed, Racard tearfully returned with a runny nose.

“Ohh.....c-cold, everything seems to be frozen.”

“Did you examine it?”

“I-I checked it. There is a lot of snow piled up but Master should somehow be able to move to the other side of the mountain. Well, that’s by my standards. The places that I saw are indicated separately.”

Racard replied as he handed back the map. He opened the map and saw the new route that Racard drew. The parts that Lariette couldn’t remember and had been left blank were connected with dots.

‘Okay. I’ve secured the necessary information!’

Ark immediately visited Haverstein with the information.

“Viscount-nim, I have a way to solve this!”

“A way? What are you suddenly saying?”

Haverstein asked. He was still worrying about the news that Bristania was marching towards Silrinad.

“A way to capture Pabiun Fortress.”

“Capture Pabiun Fortress? What is it?”

Haverstein hurriedly asked. Ark opened the map on the table and summarized Lariette and Racard’s information. Haverstein frowned at the map before he looked towards Ark.

“This is.....smugglers? Smuggler’s Pass?”

“Did you know about it?”

Haverstein stared at Ark with an astonished expression before shaking his head and saying.

“No, I’ve heard of it before. That there was a secret route smugglers used to travel between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality somewhere in the Albana Mountains. The border guards searched for a few years but they couldn’t find anything so I thought it was just a rumour.....it really exists? Where did you get this information?”

Should he say that a minstrel in a tavern gave the information? Judging by Haverstein's anxious expression, he couldn't joke around at a time like this.

"I got my hands on it accidentally."

"The route drawn on this map is really Smuggler's Pass?"

"Yes. The person who told me is reliable and I confirmed the information using my pet."

"If you say so then I'll have to trust you....."

Haverstein sighed as he looked at the map again and muttered.

"Like I said, the border guards investigated for a long time before dismissing it as rumours. That's because the Albana Mountains are so steep that it is impossible to think there is another route other than Pabiun Canyon. Moreover, winter is when the Albana Mountains is the most dangerous. It will be impossible to move 30,000 troops through Smuggler's Pass."

"Moving 30,000 troops isn't necessary."

Ark answered bluntly.

"What do you mean? There are tens of thousands of monsters stationed at the fortress. In order to fight against them....."

Haverstein spoke before suddenly closing his mouth. It was because of Ark's response. His expression cleared and he nodded.

"The method you mentioned....."

"Yes. Currently the expedition can't penetrate Pabiun Fortress because of the monsters stationed there. But to be precise, it isn't because of the 'monsters.' The problem is that the Black Obelisk Forest would resurrect the killed monsters."

That's right. The monsters from Pabiun Fortress had received considerable damage from the expedition's attacks. But the reason it didn't fall was that the black obelisks restored the monsters after a period of time. The effects of Earth Blast lasted 24 hours so the monsters could be restored in time. Even if the Gripper died while using Earth Blast, they would just be restored so the situation repeated again and again. It might seem weak but it was a successful defense tactic. There was no doubt that someone was controlling the monsters.

'The Black Obelisk Forest had deliberately been placed to the rear of the fortress so it isn't possible to stop the resurrection. It's also impossible for the users to go behind the fortress. It isn't perfect but the movements could be controlled to some extent.'

It was unthinkable. But Ark had already heard from Global Exos that users were involved with the enemy. Then wouldn't it be a user controlling the monsters in Pabiun Fortress?

'But a user wouldn't know about Smuggler's Pass.'

Ark moved his finger along the line drawn on the map and smiled. He could use it to bypass the fortress and move to the Black Obelisk Forest.

"If we blow up the Black Obelisk Forest then the problem will be easily solved."

Ark had thought of a plan the moment he received information about Smuggler's Pass. Of course the black obelisks would just be restored. However, the time it took for the black obelisks to be restored was incomparable to the resurrection time of monsters. The court magicians determined that it took about a week to ten days to appear again after it was destroyed. They could wipe out the monsters and capture Pabiun Fortress in that time. Once they occupied the fortress than the resurrection of the obelisks wouldn't be a problem anymore.

"But there will be quite a few monsters at the Black Obelisk Forest...."

"Draw them out."

Ark pointed to Pabiun Fortress on the map and said.

“Those who died in the battle yesterday will be restored by now. As you know, the number of monsters for each black obelisk is fixed. In other words, if those guys don’t die again then no more monsters will emerge from the Black Obelisk Forest. If the expedition force rallies all the troops and attacks Pabiun Fortress then all the resurrected monsters will attack.”

“You want us to attack the fortress until all the monsters leave the Black Obelisk Forest?”

“Yes. The Black Obelisk Forest is approximately 1 kilometre away from the fortress. You can just arrange the siege weapons and stay behind them to minimize the damage while attacking the monsters.”

“Certainly.....”

Haverstein murmured in a cheery voice. So a plan was developed to capture the impregnable fortress. But the success of the operation depended on one important prerequisite.

“In the end, the issue has returned to the starting point. If there are fewer troops then it will be easier to make it through Smuggler’s Pass. It will also take a minimum of one day to capture Pabiun Fortress after the obelisks were destroyed. In order to reach Silrinad before the Bristania expedition, you’ll have to get through Smuggler’s Pass and destroy the obelisks within three days.”

“It is possible. No, I’ll make it possible.”

“Then you will go?”

“If there is a warrior more reliable than me in the expedition then I will concede it to them.”

“.....Isn’t that impossible?”

Haverstein smiled and murmured. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Expedition's Commander has accepted Ark-nim's strategy.

* Art of Communication increased by 30.

* Political Power increased by 20.

* Achievements increased by 500.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade (Event Quest)

+ Sub Quest: Blow up the 'Black Obelisk Forest' operation

The Schudenberg expedition has been blocked by monsters and is unable to cross the border to the Sinius Principality. Ark-nim has proposed a new operation and the Expedition Commander Haverstein accepted.

Operation Overview: Use the secret route that smugglers use to travel between Schudenberg and the Sinius Principality to bypass Pabiun Fortress and destroy the Black Obelisk Forest before the monsters can be restored. While the special attack corps is approaching the Black Obelisk Forest, the expedition army will attack Pabiun Fortress to draw the attention of the monsters.

<Difficulty: A+>

Once Haverstein accepted Ark's proposal, it was immediately registered as a sub quest. Of course, this mission wasn't one that Ark could do alone. So Haverstein summoned the unit leaders and explained Ark's plan. However, Haverstein's decision was received with backlash from the leaders.

"You're leaving such an important mission to the one in charge of supplies? It is ridiculous!"

"Even if he is the one who came up with the plan, this is too excessive!"

“Yes, a warrior should take over this mission!”

When the strategy was explained and Ark was designated the one in charge, the leaders immediately made a disturbance. The users also opposed it. This was a huge mission concerning the fate of the expedition. If the operation leader completed it successfully then they could get enormous achievement points. The users couldn't give up such a chance. But Haverstein asked the room with a fierce expression.

“Do you really think Ark doesn't deserve the mission?”

“Of course!”

The leaders answered simultaneously.

“Look again and answer. Do you really think there is anyone better than Ark?”

The unit leaders started at Ark after hearing the same question. In the next moment..... Their eyes widened with shock.

“Of course since he is a merchant.....heok, what, what the?”

“T-that was Lord Ark.....then Lord Ark is.....”

The leaders stuttered with a stunned expression. They looked at the place Ark was standing just now. But Ark wasn't visible when they looked again. He had changed into a wolf with black fur. From Schudenberg to Seutandal, there were no users in New World who didn't know the name Dark Wolf after he defended Lancel from the bandit group.

“He is Dark Wolf.”

Haverstein smiled and replied. The users' doubts were also calmed after Dark Wold's true identity was revealed.

“The ones that played a key role in the Bristania expedition were Bread and the magician Redian. But Schudenberg also has a warrior

comparable to them. That person is Dark Wolf. Do you think there is anyone more qualified than him?"

The leaders all closed their mouths. After that the establishment of the special forces was quickly conducted. There was significant achievement points involved so there were many eager applicants.

'But there is a time limit so it isn't possible to take a lot of troops. 300 people should be suitable. We also have to quickly go through Smuggler's Pass so the users should be at least level 300.'

Ark carefully looked around the troops and selected 300 people to share the quest with. It was a situation which emphasized speed so they also couldn't bring many supplies. Equipment and food necessary for hiking was required. But there was one essential item that couldn't be omitted.

-Starlight Bomb (Special)

A special bomb developed by the Magic Institute with Holy Power inscribed on it. It particularly exerts a strong power over enemies with the demonic attribute. The development isn't perfect so it will take a significant amount of time for the bomb to blow up. But it has a strong explosive force that is capable of destroying the black obelisks. So it can be utilized to destroy the black obelisks.

<Once triggered, it will take 10 minutes to explode and will deal 5000 damage to all obelisks in a 1 metre area. When used on demonic monsters, it is possible to inflict 200 damage>

"The fate of Schudenberg expedition lies with you."

Haverstein said after handing over the Starlight Bombs to Ark. But the destiny of the Schudenberg expedition had never been on Ark's mind.

'I'm only interested in protecting the money! I can't forgive any monsters that interfere in my business! I will blow all of them up!'

A motivated fire was kindled in Ark's eyes.

After that it was like a documentary on human victory. Ark's kindled motivation quickly disappeared in the snow covered mountains. Even the smugglers avoided these mountains during winter. The place was more dangerous than Ark expected. The piles of snow created an illusion of the ground only to discover there was a crevasse. There were also occasional earthquakes which caused falling rocks to smash the head of the special forces. 10 hours after entering Smuggler's Pass, the 300 members had been reduced to 200. Without Lariette's information and Racard's scouting, the 200 hundred remaining members probably would've been killed.

'This operation has to succeed no matter the cost!'

Ark reiterated again with clenched fists. And they finally reached the last checkpoint of Smuggler's Pass after all that suffering.....

'Did I come all this way just to die so absurdly?'

Ku ku ku ku, ku kwa kwa kwa!

Ark stared at the huge grey monster of snow. The problem wasn't dying. If Ark died here than the strategy would fail. In summer, this valley was a place where the road below could be used. But the accumulated snow meant that they had to use a rope to move between cliffs. If Ark died here then the rope would snap and the method to move to the other side would disappear. Racard would also disappear when Ark died so he couldn't retrieve the rope. The operation would be halted. In the end Haverstein would have his Commander position taken away. And Ark would have too much stock and would become bankrupt. If he had no money than his mother couldn't even go to the hospital anymore.

'No. I can't let that happen! I can't die like this!'

Desperation ignited in Ark's eyes.

‘What.....there must be some way!’

Ark considered all the possible measures. Was there a quick way to return to the cliff and avoid the avalanche? He couldn’t be swept away from the avalanche. Should he grab the hand glider from Radun to run away?

.....There must be some way to escape the avalanche.

Should he grab the rope tightly and pray?

.....As long as the rope wasn’t swept away by an avalanche.

Every possible suggestion ended in him being buried by the avalanche.

‘Is there really no way?’

Ark worried like crazy. Then sparks flew in Ark’s head as he clenched the rope firmly.

‘Wait? Yes, that’s the way.....!’

Now wasn’t the time to worry about whether it was possible or impossible. As soon as Ark came up with the idea, he took out his sword and started cutting the rope. The rope had a durability bonus so it didn’t break easily. But the rope finally snapped after a few more attempts. When the rope snapped, Ark was swung towards the other cliff. If Ark crashed into the cliff then he would be squashed like a ripe tomato!

“Now’s the time. Riposte!”

Ark used Riposte the moment he was about to hit the cliff. Riposte pushed the enemy back 10 metres. However, it was impossible to force the rock wall back. Instead, the force of the rope’s swing and Ark’s body caused him to stop moving. Then the avalanche was almost upon him. Ark was still clinging to the rope!

“If I stay here I’ll die! Sprint!”

Ark grinded his teeth together and shouted. He turned his body and used Sprint to run up the cliff. Ark hung onto the rope while running up the cliff. That's right. That was the method Ark came up with. It was a technique to use run up the cliff while hanging onto the rope!

"Damn, it's still lacking a bit!"

The speed of the avalanche was faster than Ark's Sprint. The avalanche rumbled and got closer to Ark. The size of the avalanche was also larger than Ark imagined. Despite using Sprint and running with the rope, the height of the avalanche was still higher. Just before Ark was about to be swept away by the avalanche, a skill popped into his head.

"That's right, Jump!"

Ark stepped on a stone and shouted. The power surged into his thighs and he jumped up 10 metres. Ark grabbed a protruding stone close to him as the avalanche passed right underneath him. Sweat flooded down his back like a waterfall.

"I-I lived....."

"Damn, that guy really has a long life."

Shambala laughed and muttered from the cliff opposite to Ark. Anyway, Ark had managed to avoid being killed by the avalanche. After the crisis was over, Ark connected the rope again and Shambala, Lariette and the other members climbed over. After that there were no more problems. Once they moved to the cliff, the path was not a relatively gentle slope. When they walked a little further along the slope, a message window appeared in front of them.

-You have exited the Albana Mountains.

-You have entered the Pabium Canyon area.

"Finally.....!"

"We've gone through Smuggler's Pass!"

The tired soldiers cheered as they saw the message. Shambala rolled his stiffened shoulders and muttered.

“The only thing left is to find the Black Obelisk Forest.”

“Not yet.”

“What? Not yet?”

“There’s one place I have to visit prior to that.”

Ark smiled and moved forward. Shambala, Lariette and the other special forces followed him. Then the snow on the ground suddenly moved and an eyeball popped out. It was similar to the eyeball stuck to Ark. The eyeball looked in the direction that the special forces had disappeared.

Act 4: Alan’s Resurrection

“Indeed.....”

Ark stared at the ruins in front of him and sighed. Then Shambala and Lariette looked at him with doubtful eyes.

“What one earth? What are we doing here?”

“Did this use to be a village?”

“.....Nuran village.”

Ark responded like he was thinking out loud. Ark had two purposes when he started this mission. The first one was to blow up the Black Obelisk Forest in order to help the Schudenberg army. The other reason was to visit a village related to the <Witness the Legend> quest that was located on the other side of the Albana Mountains. That’s right. The destination of the <Witness the Legend> quest was a village on the border of the Sinus Principality. It was the Lore quest he received after

collecting 10 ☆'s. If he completed it then a big prize would be waiting! But after he arrived at the destination, the whole village along with the NPCs had disappeared. However, Ark didn't look hopeless as he looked around the devastated village.

"It has been more than 10 days since the darkness started spreading....."

In fact, Ark had already guessed that it would reach here. The Sinius Principality was flooded with darkness and monsters had attacked every village and city. Only a few fortified cities managed to barely stop the monsters' attacks. A small mountain village in the mountains wouldn't be able to survive it. The destruction of Nuran village was expected. Yet the reason he came here was that this wasn't the final destination of Ark's quest.

'In order to meet the prophet clan to complete the <Witness the Legend> quest, I have to meet with some NPCs on the outside first. Since the prophets live in a hidden village.'

But detailed information about Nuran village was written on the information and it was even marked on the map of the Sinius Principality. In other words, the sequence was 'Nuran village= Prophet Clan.' Then the answer was that he could get information about the prophet clan from Nuran village.

'I need to get information from Nuran village so there might be a way even if it is in ruins. There might even be NPCs who survived the attack from the monsters.'

It was the reason why Ark looked for this location despite his busy schedule. If the Schudenberg expedition moved on after capturing Pabiun Fortress then he would have to go with them. That meant this was his only chance to explore Nuran village. And Ark had 200 expert users as his subordinates. He could also have the users search for him. If there was a clue remaining then it wouldn't be difficult to find.

'Fortunately it hasn't been a long time since the village was attacked.'

“Everybody concentrate! From now on everyone should search through the ruins.

This task is very important so notify me immediately if there are any survivors.”

The soldiers scattered at Ark’s order and looked through the rubble. Then Shambala looked at him with suspicious eyes.

“This task is very important? Really?”

“Are you questioning your leader?”

“Master!”

Ark had retorted in a sharp voice. Then Racard who had been scouting the area hurriedly flew back while shouting.

“What? Monsters?”

“N-no, a monster is a monster..... That guy! It’s him!”

“That guy? What do you mean?”

“A-A-A.....”

Racard stuttered breathlessly. Then Shambala flinched and spat out a string of curses.

“Uh? Holy shit! Ark, we’re surrounded!”

“Surrounded? What.....”

Ark looked around with a confused expression. Hundreds of monsters were surrounding the ruins where the special forces were? Monsters with the body of a human and a lion and the head of a bull.....there were 800 of the demonic monsters!

‘Damn! How did we get surrounded by so many monsters?’

Ark made a puzzled expression.

“I’m glad that I found you.”

Ark turned his head as he heard a voice from behind him.

Ttukuk, ttukuk..... Somebody slowly emerged from among the monsters. It was a knight wearing bony black armour while riding a skeletal horse. When the knight lifted his helmet, Ark and Shambala shouted at the same time.

“Alan!”

“I’m also glad that you haven’t forgotten my name.”

Alan who was inside the black armour muttered.

‘What the hell? How did he appear in a place like this? Didn’t he quit the game? No, what’s with the monsters? Alan is travelling around with monsters? In addition, it looks like Alan is the one commanding them. A user is controlling that many monsters? Such a thing is impossible. Although it is impossible.....’

Ark looked at Alan and had a thought pop into his head.

‘Ah, is it that?’

Ark narrowed his eyes and nodded.

“This type of situation can’t be considered an error but it more like a type of bug in the system. Several users seem to be intentionally abusing this bug.”

That was what he heard when he visited Global Exos not long ago. Users were exploiting the bug!

‘Then Alan is one of those users?’

If Alan was controlling the monsters than that explained their strategic movements at Pabiun Fortress. Then Alan led a squad of monsters and appeared here.....

“What business do you have with me?”

“What do you think?”

Alan asked as he stared at Ark. Although his voice was calm, anger was obvious in every line of his body. It was natural. Ark was the person who stepped on Alan in the past. It was a situation that couldn't be helped but Alan received enormous damage from Ark. Silvana was taken away and his guild disbanded. He also became a criminal in the eyes of every user. He had been buried in New World. It was a grudge that was impossible to forget in 1 year.

‘It’s not an exaggeration to say that we’re mortal enemies.

Neither one of us can endure each other.’ But Ark didn’t know the reason behind Alan’s biggest grudge against him.

“Ah, Alan-nim?”

Lariette who had been observing the atmosphere between the two people said carefully. At the same time, Alan shouted in a rough voice.

“Shut up!”

Lariette paled and retreated after hearing Alan’s shout. But Lariette wasn’t the only one surprised. Ark was also shocked by Alan’s violent reaction. Ark had thought that Alan and Lariette were still lovers. Thanks to the misunderstanding, they had intentionally avoided mentioned Alan’s name to each other. Despite examining his feelings for Lariette many times, he was still blocked by the presence of Alan. A meeting between Lariette and Alan had weighed on his mind. But that idea quickly shattered after Ark saw Alan’s reaction.

‘What the, this reaction is? Well, anyone would be angry if their girlfriend was with the enemy but isn’t this reaction too severe? Does that guy have an abnormal character? Or.....’

Had he been misunderstanding the relationship between Lariette and Alan? It was the first time Ark had that thought in 1 year. But Ark had no more time to continue that thought.

“It’s starting now. Ark, Lariette and Shambala! I’ll make you realize what a big mistake you made antagonizing me. I’ll pay you back one hundred, no one thousand times!”

Alan stared at Lariette before raising his sword and shouting.

“Step on all of them! Don’t let even one person escape!”

Kuaaaa! Awooooo!

The hundreds of monsters yelled and rushed forward. Therefore Ark no longer had any time to think about various situations. Currently 800 monsters were surrounding them. There was a reason the special forces couldn’t die. Did they have to fight if the odds weren’t in their favour?

‘I have to find some way to escape!’

“Damn, defense formation!”

The users in the special forces were specially chosen from 30,000 troops. They were warriors with excellent levels and skills. Rather than falling into a panic, the soldiers neatly formed the defense formation at Ark’s command. The warriors used their large shields to form a circle with the archers and magicians in the middle. A perfect circular camp had been formed in seconds.

“Lariette-nim, your buffs!”

“Warrior’s Soul, Shining Sword, Light of Vitality!”

-The Innocence Knight has used the Warrior’s Soul.

<The strength and stamina of all allies within a 100 metre radius will increase by 30>

-The Innocence Knight has used Shining Sword.

<The sword attack power of all allies within a 100 metre radius will increase by 20%>

-The Innocence Knight has used Light of Vitality.

<All allies within a 100 metre radius will have their health recover by 5 every 10 seconds>

The set of three buffs were scattered around the circular camp. Thanks to the three buffs being piled off, the combat power of the soldiers increased by 20%. Just before the soldiers collided with the monsters, Ark threw the Saw blade and shouted.

“Summon Demon, Razak. Sword transformation release. Iron Fire Wall!”

Ttadak, ttadadadak, tadaadak!

The Saw blade flew through the air and transformed into Razak. Razak raised his shield as soon as he transformed. It was the Blazing Fire Draconian Shield.

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Kwa kwa kwang, hwarrruk!

Razak roared (?) and slammed the shield into the ground using his strength. Giant wings of fire opened on both sides of the shield like a Firebird. The wings fluttered and hit 100 monsters that approached. At the same time, the flames from the wings jumped to the monsters' bodies. It was the special skill of the Blazing Fire Draconian Shield, Iron Fire Wall! The 100 monsters that blindly rushed in were enveloped in flames and became 'stunned.' It was a great opportunity! Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

“Now! Archers and magicians, use your wide area skills!”

The wide area skill did less damage than general skills but could attack all enemies in range. But the wide area skill couldn't designate the target. So it could be used in the midst of confused fighting where friends and foes were mixed together. That's why Ark lured the monsters first and then stunned them using the Iron Fire Wall.

“The dead sea, unleash the storm of your power..... Tornado!”

“Arrow shower!”

The wide area skills concentrated on the stunned monsters. Tornados tore through the area, hail poured down like a blizzard and there was a shower of arrows! Dozens of wide area skills were concentrated on one area. It was a death space! The monsters confined in that space lost 50% of their health instantly.

“Move to a battle formation and kill the monsters that already have their health decreased!”

“Ohhhhh!”

The soldiers rushed at Ark’s command while maintaining the circular formation. Currently they were surrounded by 800 monsters. If they broke their formation in such a situation then the soldiers would probably be driven back into a defensive position. With the numbers overwhelming superior to them, it would certainly be instant defeat.

‘I should maintain a 7:3 ratio of defense and attack and reduce the number of enemies.’

But as expected, it was just a temporary solution. The special forces only had 200 people while the monsters were 4 times that with 800 of them. Of course the special forces consisted of elite users with most of them over level 350. But the monsters Alan brought with him had an average level of 400. Furthermore, the demonic sphere of influence meant the special forces had their stats decreased by 20% and the monsters increased by 20%.

‘It is impossible to win in this state. Even if we can win, the special forces will be almost wiped out. But as long as one person has the Starlight Bomb, they can succeed in blowing up the 50 black obelisks. In that case, we just have to fight and look for an opportunity to run away. But the problem is.....’

The soldiers had successfully taken care of the first wave of monsters. That.....

“Ark, behind you!”

Then he heard Shambala’s voice. Ark flinched and turned around, seeing a sword aimed at his back. Alan had charge forward on his skeletal horse and swung his sword. Ark reflexively lifted his sword and blocked it. He hadn’t expected it and lost his balance, rolling across the snowfield. Then Alan’s sword fell vertically again. Ark tried to kick the ground to get up but his foot slipped on the ice and he fell again. The sword aimed towards the crown of Ark’s head. No, it was about to split him in half.

Syu syu syu syuk, ka ka ka kak, chaeng!

Three or four daggers flew through the space and hit the sword. The orbit of the sword was changed and it passed by Ark’s head. Alan tried to attack again when his first one failed but he moved back with an irritated look as daggers kept on flying at him. Ark finally got up and regained his posture. Then Shambala who had thrown the daggers appeared next to him.

“I hope you haven’t forgotten that your friends are here.”

“You’re a good friend so take as much as you want.”

“I have to respectfully decline.”

“Really?”

Ark smiled and looked at Alan.

‘This is a chance!’

Ark’s current goal was to minimize the loss of troops and to run away. And the biggest obstacle wasn’t the monsters but Alan. Currently Ark was in the complicated Pabiun Canyon. It would be easy to use the terrain to defeat the monsters following them. However it wouldn’t be that simple if the opponent was a user. A user wasn’t stupid so they wouldn’t be tricked easily. Moreover, the person commanding the monsters was Alan. If he ran away without a plan then it was possible

the situation would worsen. Ark had to deal with Alan first before they could escape.

‘I was really concerned that Alan would hide in the rear behind all the monsters. Then it would be harder to find an opportunity to catch him. Yet he appeared right in front of me.....’

Perhaps it was because of his Alan’s grudge and pride.

‘Your grudge will be your fatal mistake!’

Ark quickly glanced at Shambala. Shambala lifted a corner of his mouth and nodded. Attack Alan using the pincer movement. That arrangement was decided with one look. Fair and square? There was no need for something like that. Whether it was reality or a game, he had to do whatever it took to win. How could he worry about fairness when he was close to bankruptcy? It was important to deal with Alan and escape here quickly.

“I’ll take the right side and you’ll take the left!”

Ark and Shambala rushed towards Alan from different sides. Alan turned his body without any hesitation towards Ark.

“Sheesh, wasn’t Ark more scary then this? I’ll show you true power. Arrow!”

Just as Shambala was about to drive his dagger into Alan.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

Dozens of arrows suddenly shot towards Shambala. Shambala hurriedly twisted his dagger but one arrow still lodged in his shoulder. Shambala withdrew and glared at the space where the arrow was shot from.

“Stealth?”

While Shambala was glaring at that space, a woman appeared. The woman with black skin and pointy ears was a Dark Elf. Shambala pulled out the arrow in his shoulder and asked in a cold voice.

“What, you are?”

“What are you going to do? Ask for a date?”

“You think I want to date a girl like you who shots arrows randomly?”

“I’m glad, I also have no interest in weak guys.”

“I’m weak?”

Shambala curled his lip as he looked at the dark elf. No, the moment he looked he flew towards the Dark Elf like a projectile. It was Shambala’s high speed skill, Blink! Shambala swung his dagger with an exaggerated movement and the snow flew forward like a wave. It was a momentum which seemed to tear the sky apart. But the Dark Elf was already gone.

“Kalkalkal, a woman can run away like a wild boar!”

“Dammit. Torrential Sword!”

When he heard the Dark Elf’s voice from behind him, Shambala cursed and rotated his body while instantly using a skill. Hundreds of daggers sprung from a dark area and covered the entire space. The Dark Elf just used a fire arrow and snorted.

“Shall we see if quantity beats quality? Explosion Arrow!”

The arrow she fired exploded and the daggers caught by the shock wave fell to the ground. Shambala was also caught by the explosion. The Dark Elf shot an arrow that flew through the sky.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Beondduk!

The arrow flew at a speed that couldn’t be avoided. It was the light speed! Shambala couldn’t even move a finger as the arrow pierced his chest. No, it seemed to pierce him. Shambala’s body blurred and disappeared.

“What, what the? Alter ego?”

“The joke is over. You stupid woman!”

Shambala appeared behind the baffled Dark Elf. The surprised Dark Elf rolled along the ground and successively shot some arrows. Since she was rolling on the ground, the arrows flew in all directions and Shambala smirked.

“Heh, I never thought I would have to fight seriously against a woman.....”

“Are you really qualified to say that? Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil’s Chasing Arrow!”

The Dark Elf shouted as she got up. Then the arrows flying all over the place turned around and headed towards Shambala like a guided missile.

“What, what the?”

Shambala hurriedly moved his body but the arrows followed him.

“Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!”

In the end, Shambala had to use 100% of his assassination footwork to outrun the arrows. From then on the real battle between Shambala and the Dark Elf began in earnest. However, the fight between the two of them was different from a fight between warriors. While a warrior’s fight was a battle of strength and stamina, the two of them used deception and agility to counterattack against each other. So it was difficult to anticipate who would win in the battle.

‘To be able to fight Shambala to this extent, who on earth is that Dark Elf?’

Ark stared with an open mouth at the fight between Shambala and the Dark Elf. Fights in New World were 60% level and 40% skills. Levels and abilities were important but the actual movement ability was also

significant. Even Ark admitted that Shambala was an expert at kung fu. But the Dark Elf wasn't pushed by Shambala's movements.

"Where are you looking?"

At that time Alan charged towards him on the skeletal horse. His sword swept up from the ground! Ark hurriedly turned his body and defended. His whole body shook from the impact and he was pushed back several metres. The impact felt like he had been hit by a truck.

'Ugh! What on earth, this impact is?'

Ark groaned as he barely maintained his balance. In fact, Ark had been contemptuous of Alan until now. When Ark met him for the first time, he felt like Alan was a wall which couldn't be crossed. But after a lot of experiences, his skills had become equal to Alan's. Then Alan lost everything and remained hidden in New World for a while. At this point Ark already thought that Alan wasn't a worthy rival anymore. Even with Alan in front of him, Ark thought he could deal with him easily. However, it turned out that Alan was a tougher opponent than Ark thought. No, they were almost equal if he was judging by the impact he felt.

'What on earth is going on?'

Their power being equal meant they had comparable stats. Ark's current level was 432 and with the dark attribute bonus is was 648. Even if he hunted 24 hours for the last year, it was impossible for Alan to reach level 648.

'How did he get this power? Damn, I'll check his information window.....'

Ark used Eyes of the Cat to determine Alan's information. But the information window just blurred when he tried to look at it. The only time the information couldn't be seen was when a scroll or a special skill like Shambala's was used. It also happened when there was a difference of 100 levels. But he didn't feel a lot of difference so it couldn't be a special skill or scroll.

‘There can’t be a 100 level difference between me and that guy. Then did he receive stat bonuses like my dark attribute bonus?’

That’s right. Alan was able to show abilities equal to Ark because of a bonus. Alan’s bonus depended on his Hate stat.

-Hatred (+ 10): The most powerful emotion a human can have is hate. At the height of your ruin, you didn’t stop hating your opponent. It is the most appropriate power for revenge.

<Hatred is only generated for those with a chaotic alignment. The user will receive a 0.1% stat bonus for every 1 point of chaotic value. In addition, all skills will be amplified by 0.1%. However, any stats which oppose Hatred will be deleted>

This was the ability Alan received when he changed to a Ruin Knight. The Hate stat meant he received a 0.1% stat bonus for every chaotic point he gained. To put it simply, if he had 100 Hate and 100 Chaotic points then he would get 10 bonus stats. In fact, this stat wasn’t useful when it was first created. But Alan had commanded monsters and indiscriminately killed NPCs in the Sinius Principality so his chaotic value was in the tens of thousands. Therefore Alan had thousands of bonus stats applied.

“Sheesh! That skeletal horse is annoying.”

Ark spat on the ground and murmured. He didn’t understand the reason but their abilities were similar. Anyway, Ark had confidence that he could defeat Alan. Ark had experienced a lot in order to reach this level. Yet Ark was struggling because of the skeletal horse. The main method of attack for a cavalry soldier was to charge, attack and then retreat. It was very simple but different for an infantry soldier to counter. Besides, Alan was someone who had ridden horses from the beginning because it was stylish. He was accustomed to fighting on horseback.

‘First I have to draw him down from the horse.’

“Is that it?”

Alan laughed and rushed again. Ark raised his sword like a baseball player about to strike the ball and shouted.

“Summon release, Racard. Summon Demon, Racard!”

“Ack, what, what the?”

Racard who had been using satellite surveillance mode to report the movements of the monsters to Lariette was summoned in front of Ark. At the same time, Ark hit Racard sharply in the bum with his sword.

“Go, Bat Missile!”

“Kuaaaaack! What the, Master I will die!”

Racard screamed as he flew forward like a bullet. Ark had aimed at Alan’s face. However Alan just sneered and hit Racard with his arm, sending him flying.

‘Damn, is it a failure? Useless bat!’

Ark clicked his tongue and muttered. After suddenly being hit by the sword and then Alan, the sniffling Racard with a runny nose flew back towards Alan’s face. Alan reflexively closed his eyes.

“This is a chance!”

Ark wasn’t the type to miss this opportunity. The moment Alan’s eyes closed, Ark ran towards the skeletal horse. He stepped on the skeletal body and jumped up, slamming into Alan’s jaw with his knee.

“Cough!”

Alan’s head shot backwards as his jaw was hit and he fell off the horse. Ark aimed his sword at Alan’s chest while they were falling. Alan opened his eyes and shouted.

“Ugh, this bastard..... Evil Insight!”

Deep red rays shot from Alan's eyes. Before Ark could react to the attack, the light had penetrated his shoulder. At that moment, the landscape jumbled up and he suddenly became busy. Alan's face seemed to multiply dozens of times and became distorted.

'What, what the? What just happened?'

Ark wobbled backwards and used Skill Penetration.

-Gore Knight skill: The Gore Knights are demons living in basements of old buildings.

Those fellows hide in the darkness and use Evil Insight to draw travellers into a world of hallucinations. While the travellers are caught by the hallucinations, they would be devoured by the Gore Knight.

<A 'hallucination' situation will be created for 1 minute>

'Gore Knight skill?'

Ark was stunned after verifying the information. The Gore Knight was a monster Ark had encountered several times in dungeons. So he was familiar with the effects of Evil Insight. The problem was how Alan managed to use Evil Insight. And that was just the beginning.

"You thought it would be better if you got me off the horse?"

Alan smirked as he ran up to Ark. Thanks to Evil Insight, it seemed like hundreds of copies of Alan were running from every direction. The confused Ark swung his sword wildly around him. But his sword never struck Alan. Alan avoided Ark's sword and yelled.

"Devil's Breath!"

This time smoke spewed from Alan's mouth. Ark's skin turned black the moment the smoke touched it and a message window appeared.

-You've become addicted to the Devil's Breath.

<You will lose 50 health every 10 seconds. It will continue until an intermediate antidote is taken>

‘Oh my god! This time ‘Devil’s Breath’ as well?’

Ark couldn’t grasp the situation. Devil’s Breath was a poisonous skill used by the Lamias. It was a deadly poison then continued until without a time limit and was one that users feared most. But the problem wasn’t the Devil’s Breath. Ark was concerned about how Alan was able to use the skill of a Gore Knight and a Lamia.

‘What on earth is going on?’ How is this guy able to use the abilities of monsters?’

“Huhuhu, this was worth changing to a Ruin Knight.”

Alan smiled and muttered as Ark was poisoned by the Devil’s Breath. That’s right. The Ruin Knight was a unique profession in New World and its true power was the ability to use the skills of monsters. The name was ‘Predator of Demons.’ This ability combined with the Devil’s Jewel meant that he could freely use the skills of monsters. Alan had absorbed abilities from 60 different types of monsters in order to get revenge on Ark. But Ark couldn’t understand those circumstances.

‘Damn, I don’t know what’s happening but I should keep my distance and observer.’

Ark instinctively sensed the crisis and withdrew. He couldn’t find blindly when the opponent could use any type of skill.

“Not a chance. Inferno!”

Alan blew fire from his mouth towards Ark.

‘This time it is fire? It is too strange. There’s something strange about this guy!’

Ark used Dark Dance to remove himself from Alan's range. Alan had the basic attributes of a knight. He wore metal armour so his movements were slower than Ark's. If Ark gave up on attacking and just used Dark Dance then Alan wouldn't be able to catch him. That was Ark's idea.

"It really is very pitiful. It is impossible for you."

Alan frowned as Ark continued to run away. Then he touched his closed fist to his chest and shouted.

"Hate aura!"

When his fist touched his chest, a strange aura appeared around it. The black aura crawled over Alan's body like a living organism. It wound around his arms, legs and body like a snake and hardened into a sort of armour. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information window floated in front of him.

-Set Equipment Option Skill: [Hate Set] Hate Aura

The Hate Set are cursed equipment with the souls of angry warriors lodged inside. The vengeful spirits are normally sleeping within the set equipment. When gathered together, the Hate Set has a fearful power.

Once all of the set is gathered, the users can amplify the power of the vengeful spirits and aim their hatred at the real world. When triggered, the defense of the Hate Set will decrease by 50% for 24 hours.

* Hate Aura can only be used by someone with the Hate stat.

<Attack and movement power will be increased by 30% for 30 minutes>

'Set equipment effect!'

Ark stared at Alan with astonishment. Alan looked different from before. The Hate Aura from his equipment was wrapped around Alan's whole body. It caused a sinister atmosphere around him.

"This is my favourite."

Alan smirked and approached Ark. Yet Alan seemed to explosively burst towards Ark at a tremendous speed. Ark hurriedly used Dark Dance to retreat. When he previously used Dark Dance, he could avoid the attacks and maintain a distance. But this time Alan had no trouble catching up and attacking.

“Huk! What, what the? This speed? Is this really 30% increase?”

When he looked at the information for Hate Aura, 30% didn't feel that large. But when they were already in similar conditions, the 30% increase made a huge difference.

‘Damn, now I can't even escape?’

“Okay, let's see who dies first!”

Ark clenched his teeth tightly and swung his sword. Ark instantly narrowed the distance and started fighting in earnest. “Dark Blade!”

“The Devil's Fang!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The two swords clashed and caused a loud ringing sound. There was only 50 centimetres between Ark and Alan. They stood facing each other without backing down. The snowstorm whirled around them and blocked the battle from outside view. After a few minutes.....

Ka ka ka kak, cha chaeng, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Somebody was suddenly pushed out of the snowstorm.

“Dammit.....!”

The person who was pushed was none other than Ark.

“I seem to have overestimated you.”

Alan muttered as he stepped out of the snowstorm. Anger swelled up inside Ark at the sight of that arrogant expression. Ark had played the

game eagerly and he had confidence in himself. Yet he had been pushed by Alan who had been a figure of his past.

‘All my struggles to get this far.....’

It was an exhausting thought. However Ark soon clenched his teeth and shook his head.

‘No, my level and skills are still superior. I’m being pushed back by his strange monster skills and the set item effect.’

That’s right. Ark wasn’t pushed back using skills. If Alan hadn’t used the Hate Aura then Ark would have a 6:4 advantage. Thanks to the Hate Aura and strange skills, this had been flipped to 4:6.

‘Damn, to think I was the ones who sold him those.....’

Anger exploded at the sight of the metal gloves that Alan was wearing. Alan was using the ‘Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred’ that Ark had sold in the auction. He was only able to use Hate Aura because he had gathered the Hate Set. In the end Ark brought this on himself by selling Alan the gloves. It was really a situation for cursing. But now wasn’t the time for regrets.

‘The odds aren’t in my favour.’

The only way to win was to use Area Declaration and Descent of the Fire Draconian. But Alan must have a 2nd stage profession judging from his abilities so it would be useless.

‘Is there really no way?’

Ark got up and checked the surroundings. Ark wasn’t the only one in a bad position. The special forces were surrounded by hundreds of monsters and more than 50 people had already died. Area Declarations couldn’t be overlapped so teammates in the same area with a 2nd stage profession were rotating the uses. However, the health of the special forces had almost reached their limits. If a dozen more users fell then the rest would quickly be killed like dominoes.

‘Even Shambala can’t help.....’

Shambala was still playing tag with the Dark Elf.

‘Damn! I made a mistake!’

Ark’s initial plan was to deal with Alan before running into the canyon and misleading the monsters. But that was under the premise that he could defeat Alan. That condition had failed so it was now the worst situation. While the special forces had killed 300 monsters with 50 of them killed, their health and mana were really low. Ark also only had 20% health and mana left. In this situation it would’ve been better if he had escaped from the beginning.

‘Should I stay here? Or do I run away?’

The answer to this question was a no-brainer.

If they continued fighting than the special forces would 100% be wiped out. But if they ran away then at least 1% was likely to survive. Ark’s purpose of ‘killing Alan and escaping’ changed. However, it wasn’t an easy thing.

‘Alan is faster than me right now. I also only have 20% health left. If I can stop Alan from moving for a short time.....’

The rubble of the ruins suddenly caught Ark’s eyes. At that moment a similar situation from the Evil Silrion rose in Ark’s head.

‘Maybe.....!’

Ark immediately used Feather of Whispering to contact Shambala.

-Shambala, let’s swap!

-What?

-There’s no time to explain. Please run to the designated place when I count to three.

-What are you suddenly saying? Hey, hey!

Shambala screamed but Ark had already stopped the whisper. Alan then ran towards Ark with his sword raised.

“What are you talking so secretly about?”

“How to hurt you!”

Ark rolled on the ground and ran towards the rubble he spotted before. Shambala also used Torrential Sword on the Dark Elf and ran towards the same place. After 10 seconds, they reached the area where a plank was acting like a seesaw in the middle of the rubble. It was the plank that had caught Ark’s eyes.

“Shambala, go up the plank!”

Shambala instantly noticed Ark’s intention. Shambala smiled and used Blink to go on the plank. Ark sprinted towards the other side of the plank. Shambala who was waiting on the seesaw flew into the air after Ark jumped on the plank.

“What, what the?”

Alan who had been chasing after Ark followed Shambala’s trajectory with puzzled eyes. He belatedly noticed and raised his sword too late!

“Petrification of Blood!”

Shambala rotated his body in the air and used the skill Petrification of Blood was a skill which increase defense by 500% for 20 seconds but made the target unable to move! Alan looked like a stone statue with his sword raised.

“Alan!”

The Dark Elf shouted as she noticed Alan’s situation.

“I am your opponent. Jump! Dark Blade!”

Ark used Jump to fly towards the Dark Elf and then used Dark Blade. It was the Jump and Dark Blade chain skill 'Adol!' While the Dark Elf had tremendous agility equal to Shambala, the attack was unexpected and she fell down.

"Do you understand now? This is called teamwork!"

Ark taunted the frozen Alan and joined the special forces. While he wanted to attack Alan, that state would only last 20 seconds.

"Ark-nim, Shambala-nim!"

Lariette shouted tearfully as Ark and Shambala joined her. The special forces were tired from fighting the monsters.

"Rush towards the canyon while Alan and the Dark Elf are immobile!"

Ark's pride didn't allow him to say that it was running away. Anyway, Ark pulled some Creative Cooking dishes from his bag and threw them at the monsters. The Hell Bomb, Pepper Beehives, etc.....the monsters were in a state of chaos from the explosion of Creative Cooking dishes.

"Everybody rush using the wedge formation!"

"Waaaaahhhh!"

The special forces ran forward at Ark's command. The magicians and archers were fragile so the warriors made a path using their shields. However, it wasn't an easy task breaking through the monsters while they had low health. Some warriors, magicians and archers died from the monsters' counterattacks.

"H-help!"

The soldiers who were in a critical condition murmured as they were dragged back by monsters. But if they delayed even a few seconds then the special forces would be wiped out.

'Damn, if I had some cursed maces then I could break through the siege easily.....'

Ark thought painfully after hearing the cries from the soldiers. If he had maces then he could use Demonic Manifestations for the 'Power Charge' effect which increased charging speed by 50% and blew away enemies. However it required three spears and two maces to use Power Charge. He had quite a lot of spears but only one mace so he couldn't trigger Power Charge. It was because he had reduced the number of cursed japtém collected while testing out various combinations.

'Damn, I ran out of cursed japtém just when I need it.'

He had to just hope that the soldiers could endure.

"Don't turn around! Give up on any stragglers! Rush forward blindly!"

While there were 30 stragglers, the remaining special forces members managed to escape the siege of monsters.

"Demonic Manifestations, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes!"

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes, shoes)

The effect exercised by this combination is 'Wind Dash.'

Wind Dash: All allies within 100 metres will have their movement speed increased by 50% for 5 minutes.

However the same effect can't be stacked.

When he triggered Wind Dash, the soldiers now moved incredibly fast. Therefore they were able to safely escape the monsters and entered the canyon.

Act 5: Inventor Wormer

There was a reason Ark had escaped to the canyon. Before leaving for Smuggler's Pass, he had investigated Pabiun Canyon and determined

that it was full of dozens of complicated passages. If he entered then he could use the terrain to somehow outrun the monsters.

‘The problem is Alan.’

Normally an ordinary monster would give up after a certain distance and time had passed and their battle states would disappear. But if Alan was controlling the monsters then they wouldn’t give up. They would follow until the end.

‘If Alan continues chasing after me then it will be impossible to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. Damn, I need to figure out a way to run away from Alan.....But now there’s no choice. I have to somehow lose Alan using the terrain of the canyon and then go to the Black Obelisk Forest.....’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

Syuuuuuu, pepepepeng!

Suddenly a flash crossed through the sky. The flash came from the village where the special forces were just at.

‘What is that flash? Did Alan shot it? Then is it a signal flare? Perhaps.....?’

Ark intuitively felt uneasy when he saw the flash.

“Master, it’s serious! Herds of monsters from all over the place.....!”

Racard screamed from above him. Ark’s misgivings became a reality. A huge number of monsters were moving from every corner of the canyon.

‘Oh my god, there are so many monsters gathered in this canyon!’

“Ah, Ark-nim, what should we do?”

Lariette asked with uneasy eyes. But Ark couldn’t think of a good idea to escape. According to Racard’s report, monsters were in all the passages that exited the canyon. Of course, if the special forces battled

desperately then they might be able to escape in one of those passages. However Alan and hundreds of monsters were chasing behind them. If they engaged with the monsters then Alan would catch up.

'Is it going to end here?'

Ark sighed and felt like he was about to collapse. Suddenly there was the sound of the wind and a message floated in front of him.

-Wormer-nim has applied for a whisper using [Secure Communication].

'Huh? Wormer? What is this?'

Ark accepted the whisper with a bewildered expression. Then a voice violently shook his eardrums.

-There's no time to explain. You guys, do you have food?

-Food?

-Do you, do you?

-I have enough for several days.....

-Good. Are you guys in danger now? I'll help you. Do you see that narrow passage at your 3 o'clock direction? Run to that spot immediately. I'll tell you in advance that I can't help you if the group of monsters follow you. So hurry before the monsters spot you.

The user called Wormer then cut off the communication. Ark's head was full of complicated thoughts. He didn't know who Wormer was and his reason for whispering to him. And what was with those words about food? But Ark didn't think for long. Even if Wormer had malicious intentions, he had no other options.

"Everybody head to the passage visible in the 3 o'clock direction!"

Ark led the special forces to the place Wormer indicated. However, they were forced to stop 3 minutes after entering the passage.

“What is this? Isn’t this a dead end?”

There was a cliff in front of him. Ark made a confused face.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Then the whole area started to vibrate. And the ground they were standing on suddenly flipped over. It was like a pot lid being turned upside down. Ark and the special forces vanished in an instant. And the floor returned back to normal.

“Did we miss them?”

The Dark Elf complained with pouted lips.

“No, all of passages exiting the canyon are blocked. There’s no way out.”

Alan answered in a firm voice. Alan, the Dark Elf and the monsters they were leading had arrived at the canyon just after Ark disappeared underground. But the floor had returned to normal so they could find no traces of Ark and the special forces anywhere. Alan and the Dark Elf couldn’t think of a reason why they had suddenly disappeared.

“There’s nowhere for them to go. If it was just one or two people then they could hide but it is impossible with more than 100 people. They can’t just sprout wings and fly into the sky.”

“This has happened once before. It was also in this area.”

There were actually two reasons why Alan was in this canyon. One reason was to control the monsters stopping the Schudenberg expedition and the other was to find ‘something’ the Red Man needed to accelerate his plans. Not long ago he had chased the people related to that

'something' to this area only to have them disappear. They had been running away and vanished just like in this instance.

'The same thing occurring twice can't be an accident. I'm missing something.'

Alan suddenly dug out his own eye with a finger. The Dark Elf frowned at his distorted features.

"Yuck, doesn't that feel really awful?"

Alan didn't answer as he just removed his eyeball. And the eyeball started to float in front of him. It was Buksil's technique, Vampire's Eye! Alan had used the 'Predator of Demons' ability to acquire the Vampire's Eye skill. That's right. The eyeball which popped out of the snow when the special forces passed through Smuggler's Pass belonged to Alan. Alan hadn't known that Ark would find out about the Smuggler's Pass. He expected that the Schudenberg expedition would use the Smuggler's Pass so he had hidden one eyeball there beforehand. Then he discovered Ark and had hastily gathered monsters together to cause him to Nuran village.

'I had a separate plan to ruin that guy but I can't let him go now that he has entered my sight. That guy and Lariette has wounded me. I can't forget it. I'll let him know what it feels like.'

Alan turned as his eyeball returned without anything.

"They're obviously hiding somewhere here. The canyon has been blocked for several days even before they appeared. This is our number one priority. Inform all you colleagues."

All the monsters surrounding Alan bowed and left. Then the Dark Elf frowned.

"It doesn't matter if we leave Pabiun Fortress to the monsters but we still haven't made any progress with 'that.' The Red Man said 'that' is our priority....."

“It is impossible for the demonic monsters to capture ‘that’ now that it has changed to a defense formation. Andel is also having a difficult time. So I’ve already requested support from the Rwigenberg. That problem can be set aside since the most important thing for me is to catch that guy.”

Alan answered without even having to think about it.

“Okay. I only joined you because I like you.”

The Dark Elf played with her sharp ears and nodded. Alan quickly folded his arms and said.

“I have no interest in another woman. Got it?”

“Are you joking right now?”

“Do I look like I’m joking?”

The Dark Elf pouted at his words. Alan unfolded his arms and looked at the Dark Elf with an uncomfortable expression.

“What, what the?”

“What on earth is going on?”

“Who? Where is the light?”

“Ah, sorry. The stone was turned off.”

A voice rang out in the darkness. The special forces were all piled on top of each other like a pile of trash thanks to the floor flipping. Luckily the height of the floor wasn’t enough to deal damage but it the special forces were crushed under the weight of their members. Ark also felt the strenuous weight of everyone on top of him.

'Damn, it feels like my internal organs are going to pour out of my mouth.'

Ark grabbed his throbbing ribs and crawled out of the human pyramid. Then both of his wrists started to throb.

'Eh? What? Why.....?'

Ark looked at his wrists with a baffled expression. Sure enough? The tattoos that needed a special criterion to unseal for Eternal Soul had lights around it. The light spread like a crack and then broke. Then an information window appeared.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

-[Demonic Response VI]: Eternal Soul stage 7 (Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When fighting against a monster with the demonic attribute, you will deal additional 40% damage and resistance to the demonic attribute will increase by 50%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, you will deal +40% damage against demonic monsters and gain +50% resistance to the demonic attribute>

-[Magi distortion]: Eternal Soul Stage 8 (Active)

Demonic Distortion will release the demonic energy sealed in the cursed equipment and this will make the space distort. The user can control the flow of demonic energy to distort the space, and it is possible to change the position of friends and foes in a 500 metre range. The amount depends on the level of demonic energy sealed in the equipment.

The equipment with a higher level will emit stronger demonic energy which can move more enemies. Typically one equipment can exchange 10~30 people. This skill can be used to help besieged allies or to strategically attack an enemy camp. You also can't exchange friends and

foes if there is an obstacle in the way.

<Equipment will release demonic energy which distorts the space and changes the location of friend and foe. Spiritual Power Consumption: 200>

He never thought that Eternal Soul would awaken. Why? Why did Eternal Seal awaken all of a sudden. The quest was on Ark's mind as he read the information for Demonic Distortion.

'It can help any allies that have been surrounded by enemies to escape.....'

Eternal Soul needed different conditions and situations to awaken the skills. In order words, it wasn't possible to awaken Eternal Soul without experiencing the required situation. There had to be a reason Eternal Soul was unsealed this time.

'Did it awaken due to being surrounded by so many monsters and almost dying?'

Well, it wasn't a comfortable awakening.

'But..... Isn't Demonic Distortion quite useful?'

Ark read the information window with shining eyes. He could use Demonic Distortion to exchange the position of enemies and allies. It didn't deal any damage to the enemy so it seemed useless, but it could be utilized to great effect in various situations. If something like the previous situation occurred when they were surrounded by enemies then it was possible to use it to escape. It was a skill that could be used for offense and defense.

'The problem is that Demonic Distortion requires equipment sealed with demonic energy.'

When he first started using Demonic Seal, he didn't have to worry about the number of equipment he had. But the situation changed now that 5 equipment was needed every time he used Demonic

Manifestations. And Demonic Distortion was also a skill which consumed demonic sealed equipment. According to the level of the equipment, each one moved 10~30 people. In other words, didn't he have to sacrifice 4~10 equipment just to move 100 people. Equipment was money so always needing to have cursed equipment prepared was quite a burden.

'Having both Demonic Manifestations and Demonic Distortion will be useful. But now I don't have that many left..... Damn, I have to use Demonic Seal every chance I have from now on. If I run out of equipment then I won't be able to use the skills.'

Then he heard Shambala's voice after he escaped from the human pyramid.

"When did you crawl out?"

"A while ago. Were you just playing under there?"

".....Ark-nim."

Lariette approached with a worried expression and pointed to one side. Ark turned around and reflexively narrowed his eyes.

'Who are these people?'

The human pyramid was currently in an underground square. And there were 60~70 gathered around the underground square while gawking at the special forces with worried looks. While some were ordinary NPCs, most of them weren't. Many of them were covered with white fur with black streaks. With tails emerging from their hips, the NPCs looked like human shaped tigers.

'Beast clan!'

That's right. Without a doubt these people were a beast clan.

'Why are members of a beast clan and general NPCs gathered in this place?'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“Huhuhu, search as much as you like. You won’t be able to find this secret base.”

He heard someone’s voice near him. A big ball could be seen. Ark looked for a while and realized it was the person’s butt. Next to the special forces was a guy with the body of a balloon peering into a machine and muttering.

‘This voice belongs to Wormer who sent me a whisper!’

“Excuse me.....”

The man refused to turn around when Ark approached.

“Please wait. They’re still on top.”

‘Still on top?’

Ark tilted his head to one side and peeked at the machine the man was looking at. The machine looked like the radars often found on submarine. The radar was a round clock shape with a needle slowly spinning. When the needle passed, a series of small dots flashed. But the amazing thing was the small letters floating next to the dots. Alan, Timosi, Tallon A, Tallon B, Tallon C.....

‘Alan? Then the dots on the machine are indicating the people outside?’

Ark looked at the machine with astonished eyes. Ark was currently underneath the canyon. Yet now he could figure out the outside circumstances from underground? It had the correct number and movement, and even their names?

“Okay. That’s it!”

The man laughed as he looked at the machine and stood up. Ark was now able to confirm the man’s appearance. He was a bearded dwarf wearing work overalls instead of armour. Ark wondered why a dwarf

and beast clan members were gathered in the underground square. But he was even more curious about the machine.

“This machine allows you to know the situation outside?”

“Ah, you saw it? That’s right, I invented a life detection radar. It searches for any life forms within a 200 metre radius and even the name shows up on the machine. I figured out your name from the radar which is how I was able to send you the whisper.”

“Invented?”

“Yes, I am the Inventor Wormer. And this place is my base.”

Wormer smacked his protruding belly and laughed.

“So those people are.....?”

“Ah, those people?”

Wormer looked at the NPCs and answered Ark’s question.

“They’re residents of a nearby village called Nuran.”

‘Nuran village?’

Ark felt refreshed by Wormer’s words. Nuran was the name of the village that Ark had been searching a short time ago. The inhabitants of Nuran village had information for his <Witness the Legend> quest!

‘I thought it was too late after encountering Alan but they’re survivors from Nuran village! That means I really don’t have to give up the <Witness the Legend> quest?’

The situation might still be bad but one problem was gone.

“How did people from Nuran village get here?”

“That is....”

Wormer scratched his head. Wormer's profession was 'Inventor' and he was a dwarf from the Sinius Principality. Just like the name, Inventor was a profession which created different machines and objects. Therefore Wormer started looking for a quiet place where he could concentrate. He discovered the underground square and converted it into an underground base. He bought various supplies from Nuran village and spent each day happily. 10 days ago, Wormer had been in Nuran village buying necessary supplies when the sky was suddenly covered in black fog and a huge number of monsters appeared. Wormer sensed the situation wasn't ordinary and urgently fled to the underground base with the residents.

"At first I thought the problem would be settled immediately because we're near Pabium Fortress. But 10 days passed and the monsters are still there. No, they actually kept increasing. And I learnt about what was happening in New world from the internet."

"So the beast clan are NPCs from Nuran village?"

"Beast clan? Ah, those guys that look like tigers? No. I hid them after those guys were chased by monsters a few days ago. But they haven't talked to me so I don't know why they came to a place like that. The beasts seemed to be acquaintances with the residents of Nuran village but they don't talk to them either."

'What does that mean?'

Ark stared at the beast clan. Then Wormer scratched his head and muttered.

"Anyway it is troublesome. I was put into an extremely difficult situation because of those people."

"A difficult situation?"

"Can't you understand by looking at my thin stomach?"

Wormer indicated his stomach and shouted angrily. At the same time Ark, Shambala, Lariette and the special forces looked at Wormer's

stomach with astonishment. He was saying that when his stomach was so big it looked like he was pregnant with twins? But Wormer wasn't concerned about their gazes and just continued talking.

"Rice, rice! My stomach is so hungry!"

Naturally Wormer had a large amount of food stockpiled in his underground base. It was obvious by looking at his size that Wormer ate a lot. So he had arranged enough food for himself. But there were now 70 people staying in his home so the food had run out by the 10th day. It wasn't possible to exit to buy food with the monsters everywhere when Wormer discovered Ark's group.

'So that's why he whispered if I have food. No matter how much he had stockpiled, it would be difficult to feed 70 people for 10 days.'

"Uhh, I had forgotten for a moment but I'm hungry. Hungry! I'm hungry! I'm so hungry that I can't think! But my machines can't make rice! Rice, I want rice! Didn't you say you had food?"

"Ah, yes. Here it is."

"Ooh, rice! Rice!"

Wormer immediately shrieked and ran up to Ark when he pulled out some food. He frantically grabbed the food and shoved it into his mouth. He was starving but couldn't a user find food in reality? The reason was that users felt a sense of hunger despite it being a game. No matter how much a user ate in reality, it wouldn't fill their stomach in the game. So users had no choice but to eat food in the game to lose the feeling of hunger. Anyway, the village residents and beast clan watched Wormer eating with desire in his eyes. They were also starving.

"I'll leave the minimal amounts of food and hand out the rest. These supplies actually belong to the military expedition but I'll pay them when I return."

Ark smiled as he looked at them and said. Then Shambala frowned like he was swallowing phosphoric acid.

“You still want to engage in business when these people are in such a situation?”

“Business? What are you saying?”

“It’s not business? Then what is the reason you’re giving them food?”

“What? You’re so strange. What do you see me as?”

“Stingy, conman, thief..... Do you want me to say anymore?”

Well, those words actually suited him. That’s right. Ark wasn’t the type to help people for free. Yet he just paid for food that would feed 70 refugees out of his own pocket. The reason why Ark acted like these was because they were residents from Nuran village and a beast clan. The beast clans were associated with Hero Maban so he didn’t know what type of help he could get from them. And the Nuran villagers had information about the *<Witness the Legend>* quest. So it was necessary to increase his intimacy with them.

‘If they’re suffering from hunger then the easiest way to raise intimacy is to give them food.’

It was why his behaviour was different from usual. Of course, Ark’s current most important goal was the *<Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest>* quest. But he couldn’t be too impatient. There were still two days left so he should watch the movements of Alan and the monsters. If he watched carefully then a chance would certainly come. As expected, the looks on the refugees’ faces instantly turned favourable when he gave them food. Ark waited until they finished eating before speaking to an old man who looked like the village mayor.

“I want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Does the prophet clan live nearby?”

“Prophet clan?”

The village mayor flinched and sent him a wary look. There was something there. And the wary look said that he didn't intend to tell Ark. But Ark was already qualified as he received the <Witness the Legend> quest. If they knew the circumstances then they would definitely give him information about the prophet clan.

'The question is how to explain the stars to the NPCs.....'

While Ark was thinking, he suddenly noticed something strange. The village mayor was looking at the beast clan after Ark's question.

'What's with this reaction? Is the prophet clan somehow related to the beasts?'

When Ark had asked the question, the village mayor had become surprised and looked at the beasts. The beast clan nodded which seemed to indicate that it was okay to talk to Ark.

"What is the reason that you're looking of the prophet clan?"

"I received the revelation of the stars."

Ark answered after briefly thinking. The beasts and Nuran residents looked at Ark with shocked eyes. The beast clan seemed to carry on a conversation with their eyes before one of them asked Ark.

"The revelation of the stars? What is your name?"

"I am Ark."

Then the beast clan member jumped up and shouted.

"Ark! You are Hero Maban's chosen descendant, Ark?"

"You know about me?"

This time Ark was the one surprised. Ark's eyes widened as a beast grabbed his hand and said.

“We know! We’ve learnt all about the things you’ve done through the Hero Stars.”

“Hero Stars?”

“You mentioned the revelation of the stars. We call it the Hero Stars.”

A beast clan member replied. Before Ark received the <Witness the Legend> quest, 10 stars had emerged from his body and disappeared somewhere. It must be the Hero Stars that the beast clan mentioned. They said that they were aware of Ark’s existence through the stars. Then information about Ark must be in the stars. If the beast clan knew that information then they were.....?

“Do you belong to the prophet clan?”

Ark asked with an expectant voice but the beasts shook their heads.

“No, we’re the White Tiger clan and we are the guardians of the prophet clan.”

“Why are the guardians of the prophet clan in a place like this?”

“That.....”

A white tiger sighed and the Nuran residents lowered their heads. The white tiger looked at them before continuing.

“In the past some residents of Nuran have been born with the power of prophecy. The prophet clan gathers those children.”

In other words, the Nuran residents had a kindred relationship with the prophet clan. But then the prophet clan discovered that the Sinius Principality was going to be attacked by the dark forces. So the White Tiger clan was dispatched to rescue the Nuran clan and bring them back to the land of the prophets, Shangri La before the darkness attacked. However, the darkness attacked quicker than expected and Nuran was already in ruins by the time the White Tiger clan

arrived. The White Tiger clan was also attacked by monsters and rescued by Wormer.

“Shangri-La!”

They had been listening to the circumstances of the White Tiger clan. Then Lariette shouted with a surprised expression after hearing that the Prophet’s clan lived in Shangri-La.

“What’s wrong? Do you know that place?”

“No, that is..... Become coming here, I received.....”

Lariette was able to say something when she noticed everybody’s eyes on her and she immediately shook her head.

“It’s nothing. I’ll tell you later.”

Ark was interested in Lariette’s reaction but he had no time to think about it now. Ark thought for a moment before saying.

“You wanted to evacuate the Nuran residents there so Shangri-La is still safe. So they must have a way to stop the attacks of the demonic monsters. Then it is imperative that the Nuran residents are moved to Shangri-La. But how can we do that when the canyon is sealed off by monsters?”

“It is already too late.”

“Too late?”

“The land of the prophets has a defense system.”

“Defense system?”

“Shangri-La is always prepared for the dark forces so they have several protection devices. Once the defense system is activated, it is completely blocked off from the outside world.”

“Blocked? But you haven’t returned yet.”

“We’ve been outside of Shangri-La for more than 10 days already. And this whole area is occupied by demons. The prophet clan would’ve judged that we failed in our mission.”

“Isn’t it called the prophet clan? Shouldn’t they know that you’re still alive?”

“The prophets can’t see everything in the future. They can only predict events that have an impact on the history of the continent. In fact, even the prophet clan couldn’t foresee the emergence of this darkness. This means the history of the continent has already become twisted. They can’t predict anything anymore. And it will be the same even if they find out that we’re alive. If the entire Sinius Principality is engulfed in darkness then the first place they will attack is the prophet clan. That is why they can’t possibly slow down or turn off their defense system.”

‘Eh? Isn’t something strange?’

Ark noticed something strange in the white tiger’s words. Just like the name, the prophet clan was one that predicted the future. Well, they could probably only predict when a new episode would be activated.....Anyway, it was natural for a clan with such power to be attacked by dark forces. But the prophet clan couldn’t predict his dark event. It meant they could no longer foresee what would happen in the future. It was natural. This incident happened because of a bug so of course the NPCs couldn’t predict it. Despite that, why would the prophet clan still be the dark forces’ highest priority? When he asked that question, the white tiger sighed and replied.

“The reason they’re targeting Shangri-La is due to the Ark of the Covenant.”

“Ark of the Covenant?”

“Yes, a long time ago an artifact was found and placed in the ark. The person who gets their hands on this ark will receive a strong power. It is the biggest threat to the dark forces so they want to attack Shangri-La to obtain it themselves. But their purpose isn’t to simply destroy the ark.”

“What does that mean?”

“Despite being filled with light, the Ark of the Covenant can also be filled with darkness. If an evil person obtains it then the attribute will change to darkness. The darkness will become even more powerful.”

The white tiger closed his eyes and talked about a past event.

“In fact, a long time ago the 7 heroes entrusted the Ark of the Covenant to the prophet clan and gathered their power to install strong protection wards. And Hero Maban asked our clan to protect Shangri-La.”

Ark now understood the situation. There was another reason other than the terrain as to why the Bristania expedition had an easier time crossing the border. It was because there were more demonic monsters gathered at Pabiun Fortress. Ark had been thinking that the strategic movements of the monsters was incomprehensible.

‘What if there is a reason the demonic monsters are here?’

And that reason was the prophet clan. If the Schudenberg expedition continued crossing into Sinius Principality then they would encounter the prophet clan. If the Schudenberg expedition got their hands on the power of the ark then they would be a big threat to the demonic monsters.

‘Then the reason Alan is here.....’

It was obvious that Alan was somehow linked to this. Alan’s purpose for coming to this place was to seize the Ark of Covenant.

‘Then the list of things I have to do has increased by one. I have to succeed in the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> task to ensure that the Schudenberg expedition captures Pabiun Fortress. Then there is visiting the prophet’s clan to complete the <Witness the Legend> quest. And finally I have to prevent Alan getting the Ark of Covenant.’

It was becoming an increasingly higher mountain. If this war ended with the victory of the demonic monsters then Ark would become a beggar. He had to do everything possible to win the war.

‘Well if the Schudenberg expedition manages to capture Pabiun Fortress and kills the demonic monsters then the remaining problems will be easily solved. I can’t receive the help of the prophet clan because Shangri-La is locked but the White Tiger clan can help.’

He could also meet the prophet clan if Pabiun Fortress was captured. He just had to complete one task and the rest would melt away. While Ark was busy thinking, Wormer rubbed his stomach and muttered.

“I have a way to go to Shangri-La.”

“What?”

“Hihih, I actually made an amazing invention a few months ago. I assure you. If you use that invention then it will be possible to go to Shangri-La.”

“Really?”

“Really. But there’s one problem. The invention requires strong magic to power it. It is a machine which requires an absurd amount of magic energy.”

“Magic energy?”

Ark asked and Wormer took out a small crystal ball.

“This contains the magic energy. It is used like a battery. My hidden secret weapons requires at least 5,000 MG of magic energy to work. Charging that type of energy will take at least one month.”

Wormer explained as he picked his nostril with his finger.

‘Is he teasing me?’

Ark's face hardened at Wormer's words. One month? Was he joking? Even excluding the other problems, the special forces only had enough food to last 2~3 days. If they stayed here for a month then they would all die. Then Wormer scratched his head and murmured.

"There is a way to charge the energy within a short time....."

"Within a short time?"

"I can extract magic energy from magic items. The magic items won't be useable anymore but it is a solution to the problem. There are other methods but that is the easiest way. Like I said, if I gather the necessary MG then it won't be a problem to go to Shangri-La."

The faces of the white tigers brightened at Wormer's face.

"If there is such a method then it is necessary to use it. We ask you. The Nuran residents are the blood relations of the prophet clan. It is our obligation to protect them and bring them back to Shangri-La. If it requires magic items to charge the MG then we willingly give you all the magic items we have. Will you also help us?"

The White Tiger clan asked Ark. Of course, Ark also had a reason to go to Shangri-La. The problem was Alan.

'Alan won't give up easily. We also disappeared so suddenly that he is still looking around. Apart from the required MG, it will be difficult to use Wormer's invention to go to Shangri-La while avoiding detection. Somehow I have to stop Alan from following me.....'

Ark thought frantically. Then he came up with an idea.

'Wait? There is a high chance that Alan is abusing the bug. Then That's right, there is that method! If I use that then I can bury Alan!'

"I understand. I'll be happy to somehow take you to Shangri-La."

Ark grabbed the hand of a white tiger and said. Dududung, a quest information window popped up.

-Shangri-La!

You have met the Nuran residents and the White Tiger clan on the outskirts of Pabiun Canyon. They are in an isolated situation after running away from the forces of darkness. Currently the only safe place from the darkness is Shangri-La.

Find a way to escape the canyon filled with monsters and escort them to Shangri-La.

<Difficulty: A+ Quest Restriction: None>

Act 6: Catch Alan!

‘That Alan, he dared appear out of nowhere? Okay. Then it is war!’

Hyun-woo exited the unit. Then he called Ho Myung-hwan for a meeting and explained the situation in detail. Ho Myung-hwan’s eyes widened.

“Alan?

Are you talking about Holy Knight Alan?”

“Yes, that Alan.”

Hyun-woo nodded with a serious face.

“I confirmed it with my own eyes. The one controlling the creatures in the Sinius Principality is Alan. The fact that he is controlling the obelisk created monsters must mean that Alan is using a black code item to make trouble or he is closely related to it.”

“Alan.....!”

Ho Myung-hwan muttered the name with a groan. He took out a cigarette and considered something before talking again.

"It that is true then good job. In fact, other special management targets like Ark-nim who are investigating also mentioned that they saw a user controlling the monsters. But they couldn't confirm the ID or appearance so it wasn't helpful."

It was that part that pained Global Exos. Like Ho Myung-hwan said, Global Exos had commissioned the candidates to investigate this incident. The candidates participated in the Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions and reported in from time to time. They saw the user controlling the monsters many times. But that was all they knew. A user seemed to be controlling the monsters.....Just like when Hyun-woo's Eyes of the Cat didn't work, Alan's information couldn't be confirmed.

'Other users could use a thief's skill like 'Penetration' or a scroll to check the opponent's information. Alan might be using a skill like Shambala's 'Camouflage' to hide his information window. The Red Man might also be hiding his information window. When I first met the Red Man, I couldn't confirm his information so I thought there was at least a 100 level difference between us.....'

Hyun-woo couldn't imagine that Alan or the Dark Elf was more than 100 levels higher than him. All three of them must be using a skill or an undisclosed item to conceal their information. Hyun-woo guessed that the undisclosed item might by a black code item.

'Alan and the Dark Elf are hiding their true identities for a reason.'

They knew they were doing something dangerous so they hid their identities. Despite that, Alan still intentionally lifted his helmet in front of Hyun-woo. Alan's skills and abilities were different so Hyun-woo wouldn't have known it was him if he hadn't revealed his face. It was all to get revenge on Hyun-woo.

'You fool. That is your mistake.'

It was unnecessary to say again but Global Exos was doing everything possible to solve this situation carefully. It had to be carefully handled to avoid a huge loss. He had a clue on how to handle Alan from that. Alan

was still a Global Exos candidate. They could figure out Alan's details with just the press of one button.

"What will happen to Alan now?"

"I can't say. It is unclear where he is a key conspirator or is simply assisting others. But if he is a principle offender then he can't be let off easily. He will be punished."

"What kind of punishment.....?"

Hyun-woo asked in a sly voice. Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and replied.

"Let's see.... I don't know the details either. As I said before, if the user obtained the item in a normal way in the game then it will be difficult to impose legal sanctions on them. But when considering the damages received this time, headquarters can't just leave it alone. If he is at least a co-conspirator then it will be severe enough to seize his accounts."

"I see."

Hyun-woo replied calmly but inwardly he was singing with delight. It was the reason Hyun-woo had disconnected while in the underground base and contacted Global Exos. Hyun-woo had no interest in the legal consequences. The important thing was that Global Exos knew that Alan was complicit in this incident. Once again, Global Exos could settle it within 1 minute. But they couldn't because they didn't have the required information. Now they had the information about Alan. Naturally Global Exos could determine all the details about Alan. They could isolate him in solitary confinement and interrogate him or other methods.

'No matter what they do Alan won't be able to play the game.'

That was Hyun-woo's aim. If Alan couldn't play anymore then he would disappear from the game. And Alan was controlling the demonic monsters in Pabiun Canyon. They would go away and ordinary monsters would appear in the canyon again. Even if they only had 120

people, the elite troops could kill those monsters. In other words, it was a strategy to capture Alan in real life. And the operation was a great success! Global Exos would quickly carry out an operation to capture Alan. What happened to Alan after that was no concern to Hyun-woo. However, Hyun-woo made a regretful expression and said.

“Alan is a user that I am acquaintances with. I don’t know what kind of situation he is in but I feel slightly uncomfortable at the thought of having Alan’s account seized.”

“Don’t say that.”

Ho Myung-hwan said.

“You know this already but hundreds of thousands of users are suffering from this incident. Global Exos used the excuse of an event but there are still a few users accusing us. It isn’t a simple problem anymore.”

“I still don’t feel entirely comfortable. Can you contact me after you decide what action you will take against Alan?”

“Of course, I’ll contact you right away.”

“Then I’ll go now.”

Hyun-woo finished and returned home. He brought his telephone in front of the unit and waited for someone to contact him. He wanted to receive the notification that Alan was caught and then connect to the game immediately.

‘Judging by Ho Myung-hwan’s words, he should be taking action against Alan quite carefully.....’

Global Exos was suffering an enormous loss from this event. Even if they were legally faultless, a big business like Global Exos wouldn’t receive that kind of damage easily. As a big business, Global Exos would definitely do something to punish Alan. Global Exos was unaware of any other users except Alan thanks to Hyun-woo’s information. His actions in New World was like terrorism. If Alan was the primary

offender who brought suffering to millions of people in New World then he would be punished in reality.

.....The probability was really high when looking at the present situation.

‘Although it is a little intense..... If he is the principal offender then he will be caught. And there is no way for him to appear in front of me anymore. Huhuhu, Alan. I’m sorry but the fight between us can’t be concluded. Because I’ll never see you in New World anymore.’

Hyun-woo laughed inside the dark room as he imagined it. However, after 1 hour, 2 hours.....he felt something was strange when 5 hours passed.

‘What the? Didn’t Global Exos lose hundreds of millions of won from this situation? They should move immediately after receiving a clue. But why haven’t they contacted me yet?’

He started to feel more and more anxious.

Diririri, diririri.

Hyun-woo finally heard the phone ringing and he picked up the receiver.

“It is Ho Myung-hwan.”

“I’ve been waiting for your call. What happened?”

“Ah, well.....”

He could easily hear Ho Myung-hwan’s sigh over the phone. His misgivings was starting to turn into a reality.

“What’s wrong?”

“Actually, I handed over the information to the Security Department the moment Ark-nim left. The Security Department immediately found Alan’s registered address and visited him. However Alan wasn’t home.”

“He’s not playing the game at home?”

“I heard that Alan had already departed overseas one month ago.”

“O-overseas? Then Alan in the game.....?”

“It seems that he is accessing it from overseas.”

Hyun-woo made a stupid expression at Ho Myung-hwan’s answer. It had been 10 days since Alan attacked and the White Tiger clan took refuge in the underground base. Alan had been playing the game from 10 days ago. In other words, Alan didn’t go overseas for sightseeing. Moreover, this event started a fortnight ago. Yet he already left for overseas a month ago. Didn’t that mean he had expected this?

“It is clear that Alan isn’t a simple participant.”

Ho Myung-hwan had the same thought as Hyun-woo. If Alan left that early then he had clearing been a part of the planning stage!

‘But why?’

Hyun-woo couldn’t understand Alan’s intentions. Hyun-woo was certain that Alan was one of the primary offenders in this incident. It was a state he couldn’t recover from. Yet.....

‘Alan is a smart guy. He should know how serious this incident is. No, he must know which is why he escaped overseas to play the game. It means he would have no troubles playing the game. But what will happen after that?’

Hyun-woo couldn’t understand. This situation wasn’t a simple joke. Global Exos had already received tens of billions of won worth of losses. It was possible they could sue Alan and there would be a huge scandal. Alan had planned this a month ago so it was impossible for him not to predict the reactions. Yet he still escaped abroad to play the game. Therefore he could continue playing even if his identity was recovered.

'Isn't it a problem if his identity was noticed in the game? Wouldn't it make the issue larger? What on earth? What is he thinking? Is he trying to strike against Global Exos?'

Hyun-woo thought Alan was involved because he wanted to get revenge on Hyun-woo. But he couldn't think the situation was that simple anymore. Of course, he might've started with that intention. But did he really have to cause such a large incident to get revenge on Hyun-woo?

'Even a bullet in the head is more likely.'

If his purpose was mere revenge than Alan would've approached Hyun-woo earlier. But Alan didn't move. He only coincidentally encountered Hyun-woo when he was going to capture Shangri-La.

'Alan has a purpose other than revenge. He is involved in a big problem that has something to do with New World. This incident might not be as simple as I thought. What's the? What is Alan trying to do that is worth the cost?'

The more Hyun-woo contemplated it, the more complicated his thoughts became. In the end Hyun-woo shook his head and asked.

"What now?"

"Anyway, Alan escaping overseas means that he is one of the ringleaders of this incident. He is clearly trying to endanger and cause confusion in New World. We have no jurisdiction overseas but we will continue chasing Alan."

"Then there is no way to stop Alan at the moment."

Hyun-woo muttered in a disappointed voice.

"That's right....."

Ho Myung-hwan thought for a moment before speaking again.

"We are utilizing all possible methods to catch him."

He didn't show it but Ho Myung-hwan was also deeply concerned. The current situation was many more times complicated than Ho Myung-hwan had told Hyun-woo. Ho Myung-hwan used the term 'visit' but it was more like a 'raid' on Alan's home by the Security Department. Global Exos thought that this event was because someone was trying to get their hands on the master code. And the master code had the destructive power to take down New World and Global Exos. The company was at stake so how could they knock and visit politely? But Alan had already escaped overseas. Therefore Global Exos was at a complete loss.

"It is certain that Alan is aiming for the master code. He probably thinks that if he gets the master code then he can negotiate his way out of this situation!"

It was natural to think like that. They had to stop Alan no matter what, even if they had to hire assassins. They concentrated all their power on finding Alan's location but it wasn't that easy. Therefore Global Exos became increasingly restless.

"If only we could connect to the main system....."

If it was a normal online game then it would be simple to determine where the users are connecting from. Of course it was illegal to check the personal information but the company was willing to break the law in such a situation. However, currently Global Exos couldn't use such an easy method. The game designer Park Woo-seong had put locks all over the main system. The only way to crack it was with the master code! And the master code was guarded by high walls.

"Is there a way to find Alan's location?"

The Security Department thought frantically.

"Do you know where Alan went?"

Someone in the Planning Department asked.

"I just know that he left for Hong Kong."

“Hong Kong..... Is there a more accurate position?”

“Not at the moment.....”

“Hmm, then it won’t be easy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Please wait a moment. Ah, here it is.”

Kim Gwon-tae typed on the keyboard for a while before pointing to the monitor.

“There have been 30,000 New World units sold in Hong Kong. When considering Alan’s personality and removing the game arcades, that is 20,000 units.”

“You want us to go around and check every house where we sold the 20,000 units?”

“No.”

Kim Gwon-tae smiled and shook his head.

“Currently we can’t access the main system because of Park Woo-seong’s locks. However, the middle circuit connecting to the system is unaffected.”

“Middle circuit?”

“Yes, think of it simply as a telephone and a telephone wire.”

Kim Gwon-tae indicated the telephone in the corner of the Planning Department and explained.

“Let’s pretend that New World’s main system is a telephone. That telephone is placed inside an iron case and we have no way to access it. But if we hack the phone wire then we can get the information.”

“T-that is possible?”

“It’s hard to explain the technical parts but it is possible. Of course, New World isn’t a telephone so it won’t be easy hacking the connected circuits. It would be impossible to find Alan if he was playing in Korea. But Hong Kong only has 20,000 personal units. Including the game rooms it is 30,000. If I search the connections related to Hong Kong then it might be possible to find Alan.”

Kim Gwon-tae looked at the monitor and smiled.

“When playing an online game like New World, all the information moves through the circuits connecting to the main system. It means that once I find the Alan’s connection, I can use the circuit to keep track of what Alan is doing and anyone he makes contact with in the game. In other words, we can grasp everything related to this incident.”

“Tell me what you need.”

Ha Myung-woo said. Kim Gwon-tae tapped the monitor and said.

“100 competent hackers and a 100 terabytes computer.”

“Begin immediately.”

From then on, the Planning Department started to attack Hong Kong’s connection server. Ho Myung-hwan had been so busy considering these preparations that he had contacted Hyun-woo late. But there were two reasons why Ho Myung-hwan couldn’t explain this to Hyun-woo. The first reason was that Hong Kong’s servers belonged to Global Exos but hacking was still illegal. The second reason was he would have to explain that they lost control of New World’s main system to explain the hacking.

“We are doing our best so Ark-nim should also continue watching carefully.”

“I understand. Please contact me if you make any progress.”

Hyun-woo sighed and hung up. Anyway, Global Exos was busy with their own preparations after hearing Hyun-woo’s information. But that

didn't solve Hyun-woo's problem. Whether this problem was resolved or not didn't matter to Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo had only told Global Exos about Alan because he wanted to stop Alan from playing the game for a few days. But wasn't it all in vain?

'What now.....?'

Hyun-woo couldn't take one step out of the underground base. And the remaining time left was only one day.

'I can complete the <Witness the Legend> and <Shangri-La> quests at any time but.....'

The <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> only had one day left. If he didn't succeed in one day then the Bristania expedition would reach Silrinad first. Haverstein would be replaced and Hyun-woo would lose the exclusive trade contract.

'It is difficult to exit the canyon thanks to Alan. The group will be completely wiped out by Alan and the monsters. Damn! It is more like I'm trapped in the underground base than hiding there.'

Hyun-woo grabbed his head and sighed.

'Wait? Trapped? I'm stuck there? Then..... That's right, there is a way!'

He suddenly came up with an idea.

"There is no time left. I have no choice but to try it!"

Act 7: Canyon Escape Operation

The climate of the Pabium Canyon was similar to that of the Albana Mountains. There were points where the wind would cause a snowstorm while intermittent earthquakes would occur and cause chunks of falling ice.

“It really is horrible.”

“The environment here was never comfortable but it never reached this degree before. It’s been like this since the darkness covered the Sinus Principality. Apart from the unidentified monsters, the climate also seems to be affected by the darkness. Why did this thing happen.....?”

The Nuran village mayor looked at the black sky as he blew out a white breath. He suddenly had his village taken away from him so it was appealing to an old man to complain. There was a possibility that Ark could lose everything as well so he could understand the feeling of the village mayor.

“I’m going crazy because of these effects!”

Racard’s voice shook Ark’s eardrum. Ark looked at the black sky with astonishment and shouted.

“What, what the? Why did you suddenly shout into my ears?”

“Damn, I’ll rather have my eardrums torn. I have no senses left..... Hiiik, uwaaaah, I’m freezing. Ohhh, why do I have to suffer like this.....?”

Racard complained in a trembling voice. Racard’s complaints weren’t for nothing. The current temperature was so cold it felt like they were being cut with a knife every time the wind blew. Racard was flying dozens of metres in the air and being battered by the snowstorm. Despite equipping the scarf and gloves So-mi made, it still wasn’t enough to protect him from the cold.

‘It’s not just Racard.’

Ark sent a look to the special forces marching. Then he tightened his collar as the icy wind hit him.

-Due to the cold your body temperature has fallen by 10%!

<If your body temperature falls below 50% then various stats will

rapidly decrease>

It was the cold penalty that applied once the temperature fell below a certain level! The White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents weren't greatly affected but the special forces had their body temperature gradually fall. Ark had already prepared the appropriate protective equipment to pass through the Albana Mountains, the 'Purified Water' tablets were barely maintaining their body temperature.

'There is a limit to how much they can endure with the winter equipment and Purified Water.'

There was a reason Ark exited the base despite such bad weather. It had been two days since they crossed the Albana Mountains, encountered Alan and hid in the underground base. The <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> quest had a time limit of three days. In other words, there was less than one day left. If Ark didn't destroy the Black Obelisk Forest within the time limit then it was over for him.

'I no longer have any choice. If this strategy fails then everything is finished. Alan can't notice.....'

Ark felt frustrated as he thought of his plan.

"Ah! Master, I found it!"

"Where?"

"At the end of the road at your 3 o'clock."

"Are any monsters around?"

"Not much. Around 150 or so?"

"That is enough to handle within 10 minutes. You said the passage on the right side?"

"Yes, there are no monsters until you reach your destination. By the way Master, I'm so cold....."

“Understood. Keep an eye on the situation and contact me immediately if something occurs.”

Ark thought about Racard’s words and looked at his group. It included Ark, Shambala, Lariette, the 120 special forces and the 60 White Tiger clan and Nuran residents. And the self-proclaimed genius inventor Wormer. They were the NPCs and users following Ark.

“Residents and special forces will fall back while the White Tiger Clan will lead the way.”

Ark organized the formation and headed towards the path that Racard indicated. Thanks to Racard’s instructions, they were able to navigate the complicated canyon within a short time and appeared at an empty lot the size of a football field. A stone pillar was lodged in the centre of the empty lot. It was a black stone pillar with a black aura around it! It was the black obelisk which caused chaos on the continent. It was unnecessary to say but the power of the curse depending on the size of the obelisk. A larger obelisk meant that larger and more powerful monsters would appear. But the obelisk that Racard found was only 5 metres at most. Usually an obelisk would be dozens of metres so this one was quite small. Therefore the monsters gathered around the obelisk weren’t that strong. The 150 Tallons were only level 250~270 at most. Ark surveyed them using Eyes of the Cat.

“We have to wipe them out quickly and retreat.”

The special forces and White Tiger clan nodded and pulled out their weapons. Presently a huge number of monsters were scattered around the Pabiun Canyon. The Tallon were at least 100 levels lower than the special forces but their numbers was inferior. And there was also Alan. If they were caught by Alan then Ark’s group would be wiped out.

“Lariette-nim, 3 piece offensive buff set please!”

“The great warrior’s soul.....Hero’s Spirit, Warrior’s Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

Hero's Spirit increased health by 10%! Warrior's Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile, Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of the weapons by 10%! Lariette's buffs spread among the troops and the abilities of the soldiers quickly ascended. The special forces then ran up to the Tallon wandering around the obelisk and attacked.

-Kakao, kakao, marimudo!

"We should finish this quickly but the troops can't take more damage. First form a defense formation to stop their attacks....."

Ark gave the order to the warriors in the front. The warriors created a barrier with their shields while a white shadow passed over their heads. The shadow that flew over the warriors was the White Tiger clan.

Grrrrrr.....keuuaang!

The White Tiger clan completely changed from what he saw inside the underground base. Although they resembled a tiger, the White Tiger clan covered in fur looked quite cute. However their atmosphere changed 180 degrees after meeting the enemy. Their thick fangs protruded between the lips and they looked like beasts placed in front of their prey. And their sharp claws increased by 10 centimetres. They were the type to transform after encountering a monster.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The White Tiger clan quickly narrowed the distance and collided with the Tallon. The combat power of the White Tiger clan exceeded Ark's imagination. The Tallon that were head-butted by the White Tiger clan went flying like a bowling pin. Their claws and fangs easily tore through the monsters that had fallen to the ground.

"What the, this is?"

Ark felt his jaw drop as he stared at the White Tigers fighting. In fact, Ark had expected that the White Tigers would be quite strong. He knew that the Meow, merpeople, raccoon clan and the Wolrang were stronger

than normal monsters with the same level. But actually seeing them fight was beyond imagination.

‘This degree of damage is equivalent to a level 400 user. And their movements are faster than the Meow and Wolrang. No wonder why Hero Maban asked them to protect the prophet clan.’

It was natural that the White Tiger clan would be strong among the beast clans. The tiger was king of the cats so of course they would be stronger than a normal cat and a wolf. Anyway, the White Tiger clan were stronger than he though so he didn’t need to be careful with his troops. Ark drew his sword and shouted as he ran towards the Tallon.

“Okay. These guys have scattered. Attack and exterminate them!”

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“Follow behind the White Tiger clan!”

The soldiers cried out and ran forward. Above all, warriors were required to have strong power. Until now they had just been trembling in the cold and hiding from monsters so their morale had fallen. But now their fighting power rose after seeing the White Tiger clan.

“Go. Heroic Strike!”

“Arrow which pierces through the enemy, Piercing Arrow!”

“Flame, swallow the enemies! Fire Storm!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Swords, arrows and magic washed over the Tallons like a tidal wave. There were deafening sounds and flashes and the health of the Tallon quickly fell. Meanwhile Ark used Dark Dance and approached the black obelisk in the centre of the vacant lot. Then he took out a piece of iron the size of a soccer ball. It was the Starlight Bomb associated with the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> quest.

'It will take 20~30 minutes to destroy the black obelisk even if we wipe out all the Tallons.'

An information window instantly appeared as Ark neared the obelisk.

-Black Obelisk (Special)

A magic structure created by the dark curse magic.

When it is driven in to the ground, the magic of the powerful curse will automatically be invoked and it will call ancient demons into this world. Even if the obelisk is destroyed, as long as the land is still contaminated then there is no way to get rid of the obelisk completely and it will eventually be restored. The black obelisk will invalidate all magic and sword attacks by 90%.

<Durability: 2,000>

Once again, the durability of the obelisk was no joke. Even if hundreds of people attacked it, the power of the curse invalidated most sword and magic so it would take at least 20~30 minutes to destroy. If it took 10 minutes to kill the Tallons then the total time required was 30~40 minutes. Alan was watching the canyon so he couldn't stay in one spot for 30~40 minutes.

'But if install the Starlight Bomb in advance then we can kill the Tallons while it is charging!'

The Starlight Bomb was the expedition's secret weapon which could deal 5,000 damage to the black obelisks. It took 10 minutes to explode. Killing the Tallons would also take 10 minutes. So Ark came up with the 'Starlight Bomb operation' where he would install the Starlight Bomb at the commencement of the battle.

-<There is 9 minutes and 59 seconds remaining until an explosion>

That message popped up with Ark installed the Starlight Bomb. The Tallons instinctively sensed the crisis and gathered around Ark.

“Heh, you really think I can’t defeat you? Flash!”

Ark snorted and flashed through the Tallons. When he moved in a zigzag pattern like a lightning bolt, the Tallons that were pierced instantly lost health. And that was just the beginning.

“I can finally get a small taste of fighting. Torrential Sword Cyclone!”

Shambala immediately plunged in after Ark used Flash. Hundreds of daggers swirled like a cyclone around Shambala. The concentrated attacks on the Tallons dyed the snow blood red. After Ark and Shambala’s attacks, the number of Tallons was noticeably reduced. With the White Tiger clan running wild and Lariette using her buffs, it was a one sided battle as the Tallons were stepped on. But the special forces didn’t kill them.

“Don’t touch the Tallons when they have less than 3% health. Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal!”

Ark jumped around all over the place and used Demonic Seal to clear up the situation. Ark was currently almost out of cursed japtém. If he could’ve used Demonic Manifestations against Alan then the situation would’ve turned out a bit better. When considering the future, the replenishment of the cursed japtém was indispensable. So Ark had everyone give them the japtém they had before leaving the underground base.

-Demonic Seal was successful.

<Thanks to the Demonic Seal, the attribute of the item has changed>

After 10 minutes the last Tallon was finally sucked into an item.

“Any casualties?”

“3 warriors died.”

“.....Remind them to pay attention to their health.....”

Ark said as he frowned. He only had 120 special forces remaining. Every soldier was important in order to escape the canyon and destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. But in this situation casualties had appeared. When Ark had started this mission, the ratio of the troops was meticulously selected but quite a few priests had died in the Albana Mountains. So there were presently only 15 priests remaining. It was impossible for them to heal all of the 120 special forces.

“It can’t be helped. We don’t know what is going to happen. Tell them to concentrate on their health and mana recovery.”

“I understand.”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It was when one of the soldiers replied. A huge flash occurred in the centre of the vacant land. The Starlight Bomb Ark planted had exploded. When the Starlight Bomb exploded, light started to wind around the black obelisk. Thick cracks spread on the surface of the black obelisk and it collapsed like broken glass. The fragments changed into small particles like sand.

“Ohhhh! Fuel, it is fuel!”

Wormer’s huge frame ran over. Wormer looked at the pile of black sand with shining eyes and pulled out a machine from his bag. He opened a magic stone that looked like a diamond at the bottom of the machine and poured in the black sand.

Chelkong, chelkong, chelkong, tturururu!

The machine started to emit smoke like a kettle. The kettle was a machine Wormer created to use the power of the black obelisk to charge the magic energy. But this machine wasn’t exclusively for the black obelisk. The original use was to dissolve magic items to obtain the magic energy which would be changed to MG. In other words, it was intended to be operated with equipment. But the problem was that the item would be destroyed if used in that way. In addition, one magic item

would only give 5~10 MG. Wormer's invention required 5,000 MG so it would take 500~1,000 magic items to charge it.

"What is this impractical invention?"

Ark murmured with outrage after he saw the results. Then Wormer retorted.

"Are you making fun of my invention? Do you think it is easy to extract the magic energy in equipment which destroying it? When the power is extracted, it is subjected to the law of entropy....."

"That's it. Stop!"

Ark shouted as thoughts swirled in his head. He was to blame for trusting the dwarf.

'What kind of invention requires at least 500 magic equipment to move?'

Ark thought with amazement after calculating it in his head. He didn't know what to expect for Wormer's inventions. But no matter how wonderful the invention, Ark had no intention of wasting 500 magic equipment. No, his heart had no intention of sacrificing it. 'Wouldn't all the special forces have to be stripped of their equipment?' None of them would be willing to give up equipment for a quest. Ark was the same. He couldn't even think about giving up magic items when he was already on the verge of bankruptcy. Of course, compared to the cost of failing this quest then giving up equipment would be cheaper. But what if they didn't succeed even after giving up the equipment?

'Wait? Magic items? Then perhaps.....?'

That's when Ark recalled what he heard the court magician said not long ago.

'Didn't the court magician say the obelisk was powered by curse magic? And curse magic is still magic energy. Couldn't Wormer invent a machine that extracts energy from that?'

A formula appeared in Ark's mind in that moment.

'Magic of the black obelisk=fuel' was the formula. Ark spoke to Wormer after coming up with the idea. Then Wormer's eyes glittered and nodded.

"Ah, that's right. The black obelisks use magic to summon the monsters. Then it is possible to absorb the magic from the obelisk."

Wormer started frantically muttering to himself and making something. It was the kettle that Wormer was holding now. So Ark risked danger and entered the canyon. 'I need to somehow gather MG.....' If MG couldn't be extracted from the black obelisk then everything was finished. After the smoke appeared, there was a beeping sound and the message window appeared.

-The Magic Convertor's job has been completed.

You have succeeded in extracting the magi form the remains of the black obelisk and converting it to MG. The MG extracted will be stored in the magic battery.

<Currently magic energy stored in the battery: 200 MG>

"It is a success! As expected. I'm a genius!"

Wormer jumped with excitement and bragged after he checked the message window. Ark sighed with relief but his expression didn't look that bright.

'I'm glad but we haven't gathered as much as I thought.....'

Ark looked around and sighed again. There were quite a number of black obelisks lodged in the canyon. If he wandered around and broke the black obelisk then it would be somehow possible to collect the necessary amount of MG. These 5 metres obelisk gave 200 MG so larger obelisks means it should be gathered faster. But including the White Tigers and excluding the residents, Ark only had 130 people that could fight. A large obelisk would have a huge number of monsters.

‘It will take one day if I only capture small obelisks.....’

As expected, the problem was Alan. Alan had yet to track down Ark’s whereabouts in the canyon. In fact, there was a reason why Ark would wander around the canyon somewhat freely. Alan judged that Ark was hiding somewhere in the canyon so he moved many monsters to block the 5 exits. So there were fewer monsters inside the canyon and it was possible to go after small obelisks. But Alan still had a troop of monsters and was going around the canyon. The amount of obelisks he could destroy before being found by Alan was limited. Ark’s group would be wiped out the moment Alan found him.

“Fortunately Alan wasn’t visible after leaving the underground base.....’

Ark sighed and mumbled.

“Master, I’ve discovered another black obelisk.”

Racard said through the wireless communication.

‘Despite what could happen, there is no other way. I have to try it. I have to fill the MG before Alan strikes.....’

“Let’s go. Thieves and magicians should erase traces of any fighting.”

Ark then moved through the canyon to find another black obelisk.

“I’ve found him!”

Ark smiled and murmured in the darkness.

“That fool, he’s been caught.”

2 video screens floated in front of Alan. One screen showed the Dark Elf Timosi and the monsters gathered in front of him. And the other one showed approximately 200 people marching through the canyon. That’s

right. The people visible on the other screen were Ark, the special forces, the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents. Alan could see them despite being far away thanks to the Vampire's Eye. The Vampire's Eye was the special ability of vampires which allowed them to freely control their eyeballs.

'They are definitely somewhere in the canyon.'

Alan was convinced that Ark was hiding somewhere in the canyon. But he couldn't find any traces of Ark despite sweeping through the canyon for a day. So Alan had devised a plan.

'If I come out directly then I won't be able to find him.'

So Alan discontinued the canyon search and hid himself. He also dispersed the monsters inside the canyon. If Ark was hiding somewhere here then he would definitely be watching for an opportunity to escape. If Alan wasn't visible then Ark would try to escape. Not long after Alan hid himself, Ark was spotted on using the Vampire's Eye.

'I don't know why he is destroying the black obelisk instead of escaping but it is over now that he has appeared!'

"He showed up? Then we should quickly go beat him up!"

Timosi fussed next to him. However, Alan just shook his head with a relaxed attitude and replied.

"There's no need to worry. There is nowhere for that guy to run away."

Alan raised his body and laughed.

"Now, shall I start the hunt?"

Flames shot from Alan's hand towards the sky.

"Master, look there!"

Ark raised his head after hearing Racard's voice.

Syuuuuk, pepepepeng!

At the same time, an intense light from a flare lit up the darkness. It wasn't just one. Several more flares continuously followed the first one. Ark felt his heart drop at the sight.

'Alan!'

There was no way that the monsters were smart enough to shoot flares. Such methods could only be used by players and NPCs. If flares were launched then the only possible cause was Alan. Ark understood the current situation intuitively.

'I thought it was strange that Alan and his monster troop suddenly disappeared from the canyon.....' As expected, Alan hid himself in order to lure me out.'

Ark had expected something like this. But there was less than 24 hours left for his mission. No, the Schudenberg expedition still had to wipe out the monsters and capture the fortress after Ark blew up the Black Obelisk Forest.

.....Ark didn't have a lot of choices.

'If I hide in the underground base then the situation will still be the same.'

Alan was firmly watching the canyon so there was no chance for Ark to escape back into the underground base. He only had a few hours left before the mission was 100% failed. But it was impossible to escape like this.

'Dammit, what is another method?'

Ark bit his lip and started thinking.

"M-Master, the monsters are coming! 3 o'clock, 4, 6, 9, 11 o'clock..... They've blocked everything up tight!"

Racard shouted urgently as he looked around the surroundings. The exits were sealed and the monsters were surrounding Ark's group. It meant Alan clearly knew Ark's location. Ark thought for a while before asking urgently.

"Is the entrance to the underground base clear?"

"There is.....the monsters haven't reached the corner yet."

'Do I have no other choice?'

Ark sighed and shook his head. Fortunately it was possible to return to the underground base but if they returned now then the mission would fail. But Ark didn't have many options now. If they were surrounded by monsters then they would die. Even if he gave up on the mission, if he survived then couldn't he still complete the <Witness the Legend> and <Shangri-La> quest?

'There has to be a strategy where we can survive!'

"Everybody return to the underground base! Racard, keep on reporting the movement of the monsters."

In the end Ark chose to survive.

"Okay, monsters are closing in from the 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock direction!"

"This way!"

Ark listened to Racard's real time traffic information and ran across the canyon. After a short time, Ark's group was luckily able to reach the dead end entrance of the underground base without conflicting with any monsters.

"Hurry! If those guys find the location of the underground base then we won't be able to hide from them!"

"U-understood. Wait a minute!"

Wormer took out the device that would open the entrance.

“That’s far enough. You rat bastard!”

A cold voice was suddenly heard from behind him. Cold sweat flowed down Ark’s temple as he turned around.

“Alan.....!”

What on earth? Behind Ark was Alan, Timosi and 500 monsters blocking the exit. That’s right. Alan realized that there was only one place where Ark could run away. The place Ark had disappeared before. Alan still didn’t know about the underground base but he realized that Ark would run to this corner. While the monsters moved and narrowed the siege, Alan had waited in this area for Ark.

“There is no way you can kill all the monsters and run away.”

Alan muttered as he looked at Ark with sharp eyes. Ark felt his last hope disappear. Now he could no longer hide in the underground base. If he hid in the underground base then Alan would know the location. Alan would do everything possible to capture the entrance to the underground base. Ark and his group would be trapped in the underground base and they wouldn’t be able to move a muscle as the entrance was destroyed. His neck had been perfectly caught by Alan. However.....

“I’ve won this game.”

Aran muttered with an arrogant look.

“You think you’ve won this game? You never thought that I lured you into a trap?”

Ark asked in a sly voice.

“What?”

“It’s true. You’re the one who fell into the trap.

Ark smiled and shouted.

“Demonic Distortion! 40 offerings!”

Cheolkeok, tung, tung, tung, tung!

At the same time, Ark's bag automatically opened and various equipment started quickly flying into the sky. Gloves, sword, spear, armour.....it was dozens of cursed black japtém. The japtém which flew from the bag formed a pentagon between the special forces and the monsters. It was a pentagon made of cursed japtém! Alan belatedly realized that something was wrong and exclaimed.

“T-this bastard, what are you planning.....? Charge! Step on all of them!”

“It's too late. You've already fallen into the trap.”

Ark said with a smirk. At that moment, the cursed pentagon floating in the air exploded simultaneously. The huge explosion caused the whole space to warp. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have used Demonic Distortion.

The released demonic energy from the equipment will distort the space, changing the location of allies and enemies.

Please designate an enemy target when changing locations.

“The user and monster 100 metres ahead and within a 200 metres area! Activate!”

Ark indicated Alan, Timosi and the 500 monsters while shouting. The space warped by the explosion started to rotate at a quick speed. The energy instantly turned into a giant vortex. It spun fiercely and swallowed up the monsters and special forces.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“What? Why is leader’s skill attacking us as well?”

The special forces couldn’t understand what was going on and burst out. However, they couldn’t move even one finger once they entered the vortex. They could only endure the sensation of the vortex rotated at a quick speed. After rotating hundreds of times within a few seconds, the confused special forces emerged on the snowfield.

“Ack!”

“What, what the? Where are we?”

“What on earth is going on? Our health doesn’t seem to have decreased? Eh?”

“Here.....isn’t this where we were before?”

The soldiers murmured with an absurd expression. Dozens of cursed japtém had exploded! They thought it was an emergency and checked their health after exiting the vortex but there were no changes. Their health and mana was the same. After exiting the vortex, they were just standing 300~400 metres away from their previous location. But the problem was the place they moved to.

“Eh? How did they get there.....?”

The special forces looked at Alan and the monsters with amazed eyes. The special forces had been gathered in a dead end corner of the canyon. And Alan and the monsters had blocked the passage. But suddenly a vortex appeared and the positions of the two parties had changed. Alan and the monsters were at the cliff while the special forces were at the exit. The special forces were at the location where the monsters were and vice versa.....

That’s right. This was the effect of Demonic Distortion! It was a skill of Eternal Soul which exploded the sealed equipment and reversed the spaces on either side! Ark smiled after changing his position with Demonic Distortion and said to Alan.

“Didn’t I tell you? You’re the ones who fell into the trap.”

“Do you think the situation has changed just because we’ve swapped locations? You fool, even if you somehow escape here the monsters have blocked all the passages in the canyon. You’ll never get away!”

Alan’s words were true. Ark had sacrificed 40 items and all it did was swap their locations. The monsters might’ve panicked and felt anxious but that was all. Neither their health nor combat abilities were decreased. If a battle against the monster begun then the special forces would be killed. Of course, Ark could now escape from the dead end by changing locations. However, Alan and the monsters were only 300~400 metres away from him. The distance wasn’t enough to avoid their attacks. But Ark still had an unconcerned expression.

“Do you think I would waste 40 equipment for a skill that changed nothing?”

That’s right. No matter how much he was pushed in a corner, Ark wouldn’t lightly waste 40 equipment. The reason Ark used Demonic Distortion in this situation.....

“Wormer.”

“Damn, I worked so hard to make that underground base.....”

Ark glared at him and Wormer sighed. He looked at Ark and the monsters with an irritated expression and pushed a button on the remote control.

Ku ku ku ku, cheoldong!

It was at that moment. The space underneath Alan and the monsters suddenly vibrated and a mechanical sound could be heard. In the next moment, the ground flipped and Alan and the monsters were swallowed up.

“What, what the?”

“Huhuhu, cool your heads in there for a while.”

Ark laughed and waved his hand towards Alan who disappeared into the darkness. That's right. This was the plan Ark came up with to tie up Alan's feet. Currently Ark had three quests to completing that required Alan to not interfere. The odds weren't in his favour if Alan and his group of monsters showed up. So Ark had come up with a way to 'trap' Alan.

‘I knew your scheme from the beginning.’

He knew that Alan had hid himself in order to lure Ark.

‘But I need him to think that I've been completely trapped. You idiot, you were the target.’

That's right. Ark had to time it perfectly in order to catch Alan. The reason Ark came up of the base despite knowing about the trap wasn't to collect MG. It was in order to gain the necessary japtém to use Demonic Distortion. And then lead Alan here. Ark had always planned to switch locations and the trap them in the underground base. As it could be seen, the plan was a great success!

“Wormer, are you sure the equipment inside is broken?”

“I'm sure.”

Wormer looked at the underground base with a regretful expression. Before leaving the base, Ark had naturally destroyed all the equipment that could open the entrance from inside. The only thing that could open the entrance was the remote control that Wormer held.

‘Huhuhu, the entrance is quite durable so it should take at least an hour to destroy even with 500 monsters attacking it. That is plenty of time to escape from the canyon.’

“Come on, let's hurry! It is time to escape from the canyon!”

Ark turned around and ordered Racard.

“Racard, search for the shortest route to escape from the canyon!”

“Looking.....looking.....complete. If you turn to the 5 o'clock direction and take the right side then you can escape from the canyon. But there are 600 monsters in the middle part.”

“Okay. Let's go there!”

Ark instantly ran across that canyon after hearing Racard's explanation. After moving for 10 minutes, hundreds of monsters appeared in front of them. It was 600 level 350 monsters! There were 200 people but only 130 of them had combat abilities so it would be quite tough to defeat all the monsters. However.....

“Demonic Distortion! The target location is in front of those monsters!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, hwiriririri!

Ark used Demonic Distortion as he ran. The 40 japtém exploded again and changed the location of the monsters and the special forces. The monsters hesitated as it was the first time they experienced the vortex. However, the special forces were already used to Demonic Distortion and ran straight for the exit. Once a certain distance was exceeded, the monsters couldn't determine their location anymore thanks to the complicated gorge. Without Alan grasping their location and giving the orders, the demonic monsters were just like ordinary monsters and lost Ark's position. Just as they cleared the obstacles and almost escaped the canyon.... Shambala suddenly thought of something and said.

“Wait? Will we be able to collect the necessary MG if we leave the canyon?”

“.....Are you stupid?”

Ark looked at Shambala with disgusted eyes.

“Hey, do you remember why we came here in the first place?”

“Why we came? That.....”

Shambala was about to answer when he stopped and closed his mouth. They had almost escaped Pabiun Canyon so a huge number of black obelisks caught his eye. That's right. The black obelisks were the reason Ark and the special forces had come to this place. The Black Obelisk Forest was 1 kilometres away from Pabiun Fortress.

"We can charge the MG even without the canyon."

Ark laughed as he looked at the Black Obelisk Forest. There were 50 obelisks in the Black Obelisk Forest! Their size also exceeded 10 metres. If he used the Starlight Bomb then he could easily charge between 5,000~10,000 MG.

'Just like when I investigated earlier, there are no monsters in the Black Obelisk Forest!'

All the monsters had moved to Pabiun Fortress. Pabiun Fortress was completely sealed so no one would've expected that the obelisks would be attacked. Besides, the monsters were just running back and forth now that Alan had disappeared. Now there was no longer anything blocking Ark and the special forces.

'I can destroy the Black Obelisk Forest, collect the needed MG and allow the expedition to capture Pabiun Fortress!'

"Now let's exit the canyon and install the Starlight Bomb!"

Ark shouted and was about to leave the canyon when he heard a sound.

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Something shrieked from the sky and a huge shadow fell and blocked the exit. The huge presence shrieking and blocking the exit was.....

"W-what is going on?"

"D-Dragon? A skeletal dragon?"

The special forces stared with surprise. The huge body blocking the exit was a skeletal dragon. Ark also panicked at the sight of the unexpected monster.

“Fortunately I arrived in time.”

Then someone’s voice was heard from the dragon’s neck. Ark flinched at the face he saw.

“Damn, it is like running into a goby after escaping a grey mullet....it is Andel this time?”

That’s right. The person who was riding on the dragon’s neck was Andel. He had thought it was strange that Andel wasn’t with Alan. Sure enough? Of course he showed up. And it had to be in a desperate situation like this.

“Goby? You can confirm whether I am a goby or not.”

Andel snorted and murmured. A red warning message floated in front of Ark at the same time.

-The elite boss monster, Bone Dragon ‘Chromatin’ has appeared.

Act 8: Death Lord

‘Perhaps.....?’

After confirming that it was Andel, Ark hurriedly looked around at his surroundings. He confirmed that there were no other monsters except for the dragon.

‘Then Andel isn’t capable of controlling the monsters like Alan.’

Ark had thought it was the worst situation because he met Andel. The reason Ark trapped Alan underground was because he could order the

monsters around. If other users appeared who could control monsters then it would be a huge problem.

‘Obviously Andel is also involved in this event but fortunately he doesn’t have the same power as Alan. If he had authority then a serious problem would occur. This means that Andel can only control the dragon.’

Alan had probably urgently contacted him after being confined in the underground base. But the situation wasn’t good no matter how he thought about it.

‘I can’t use Demonic Distortion in this situation.’

The reason Ark was able to use Demonic Distortion to outrun the monsters in the canyon was because Alan wasn’t there. If Alan knew Ark’s movements and controlled the monsters then there was no possibility of escaping even with Demonic Distortion. But Alan was trapped in the underground base and now this guy appeared with a monster.

‘There is no point using Demonic Distortion on this dragon. Andel can just use the dragon to catch up with me. No, the destination is the Black Obelisk Forest so there is no way I can escape Andel and the dragon.’

In the end, he had to get rid of Andel and the dragon in order to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest. However, Andel had appeared with a level 500 elite dragon boss!

‘It isn’t an opponent I can beat with 130 people. Furthermore, I only have 35 minutes left.’

Alan wouldn’t be trapped forever. Wormer said the door would endure for 1 hour and they had already consumed 15 minutes exiting the canyon. And the Starlight Bomb took 10 minutes to explode so he needed to deal with Andel and the Chromatin before Alan caught him. It was probably Alan’s aim behind calling Andel.

‘Damn, I have to defeat a level 500 elite boss with 130 people?’

Despite his worries, there was nothing he could do.

‘I have no other choice! The residents might disturb the fight so I’ll have them sneak out of the battle area. The rest depends on power.....!’

Ark lifted his sword and was about to give an order to charge. Andel laughed, tapped the neck of Chromatin and shouted.

“These boring guys, go Chromatin!”

Oduduk, oduduk, odududuk!

The body of Chromatin started changing. Just like when Razak reformed into the Saw Blade, the several thousand bones disjoined and reassembled to form what looked like a scorpion. But the problem was the bones which formed the tail of the scorpion. The bones split into hundreds of sharp piece.

“What, what the? What is with the huge number of bones?”

“Huhuhu, receive the attacks of my pet monster Chromatin!”

“Heok, everyone prepare to defend!”

Ark hurriedly burst out and lifted his sword. The hundreds of bones from the Chromatin’s tail simultaneously headed towards the special forces.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

They then exploded once they reached the special forces. After a while, the snowstorm which was stirred by the confusion stopped and Ark was shocked. The bombing of the bones had inflicted horrible damage on the special forces. The shields weren’t able to stop the bones. Warriors flew dozens of metres away and ended up upside down in the snow while the archers and magicians were dripping blood. Ark had lost 15% health with one attack. Chromatin’s attack dealt tremendous damage.

“Ack! What a ridiculous cheat skill.....!”

“Hahaha, look at you now!”

Andel laughed with an arrogant expression from Chromatin’s neck after Ark stumbled.

“I’d like to see you act cool now.”

“This bastard.....!”

“That’s right. I’ll make sure you taste torment.”

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Chromatin began to attack in earnest. The soldiers couldn’t block the hundreds of bones attacking from different directions. If they tried to block the bones flying from the front then some would come attacking from the side. The hundreds of bones could move freely like a living snake!

“Hahaha! How is it? Chromatin’s Power?”

‘Damn, the special forces can’t even attack.....!’

Ark glared at Andel. But it wasn’t just the special forces. Thanks to the narrow canyon, the White Tigers couldn’t avoid the bones as well as attack Chromatin.

‘I have to find a way to breakthrough!’

Ark turned to avoid the flying bone and looked at Shambala. Shambala seemed to think the same thing as well because he nodded his head silently. In this situation, they had no time to rest because they had to avoid the relentless bone attacks. The only way to inflict a counterattack was to stop the momentum of the bones. The only person who could keep up with Ark and attack Chromatin was Shambala.

“I’ll go first. Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!”

Shambala combined his footwork with Blink and it seemed like he split into dozens of forms. Shambala crossed through the space as he avoided the bones.

“Flash.”

He also had a technique similar to Shambala’s afterimage skill. A flash of light split through the space. There was an intense ringing sound and Chromatin stumbled. The movement of the bombs attacking the soldiers also became disordered.

‘Okay. It has an effect!’

“Dark Dance!”

Ark continuously used Dark Dance. When Ark approached, 10 bone stems emerged from different directions. Ark maintained an 80% completion rate for Dark Dance and the bone stems narrowly passed by him.

“Okay. Let’s give him a taste! Radun, a demonic sealed sword!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth and spat out a black sword.

“Blade Tempe.....”

Ark rushed up underneath the Chromatin’s jaw and was about to use Blade Tempest. Andel just watched from Chromatin’s neck and laughed.

“Kukukuku, throw your body as much as you like. Chromatin, land mines!”

Kurwarwarwarwa, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Chromatin shrieked and slammed down a huge paw. At the same time, black sparks spread through the ground. When the black sparks touched his foot, it felt like his foot had been turned into a block of wood.

“Heok, what, what the?”

-You have encountered a land mine.

<You will enter a Paralysis state for 3 minutes>

He had become paralyzed by Chromatin's attack. Chromatin grasped the chance while Ark couldn't attack to aim the 10 bone stems at him. He couldn't move to avoid the attacks and received some critical hits. Therefore Ark lost 30% of his health and also starting 'bleeding.' Ark wasn't the only one in this situation.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

The land mines had spread through the whole passage so the soldiers also became paralyzed and fell victim to the bone attacks. Although they didn't receive the concentrated attack like Ark, the soldiers still received a lot of damage.

‘This is ridiculous!’

Ark wobbled to one side and kneeled down as he looked up at the giant Chromatin. The hundreds of bones had the ability to move freely and the soldiers couldn't even attack it properly when they were in their best condition. So how could they avoid it now that they were paralyzed? Wasn't this too severe even for a boss monster?

‘The land mine isn't troublesome by itself.’

The Land mine only became a problem when Chromatin used it in conjunction with the hundreds of bones. Ark already knew a way to deal with Land mine. Land mine was a technique which sent a shock wave through the ground. Land mine caused sparks to move across the ground so if he got the timing right then he could easily jump and avoid it.

‘But I use Dark Dance and Shambala uses Blink. Both skills require the foot to be on the ground. If I jump to avoid the land mine then the skill

would be cancelled. Then I wouldn't be able to avoid the attacks from the bone stems. Dammit! There has to be another way.....'

"You idiot, where did your thoughts wander off to?"

He heard Shambala's cry from nearby.

"What?"

"Master! Above, above you!"

Ark looked up at Racard's words and his face turned as pale as a sheet of white paper. Dozens of bones were covering the sky and falling towards Ark? Ark panicked and tried to use Dark Dance.

"Land mine."

Chromatin's paw hit the ground again at Andel's command. Ark had used Dark Dance but then he reflexively jumped to avoid Land mine. But this was Ark's crucial mistake. His hasty jump meant he had avoided the land mine. But there were still dozens of bones over his head. If he fell then he would be turned into a hedgehog.

"Pure Shield!"

Lariette quickly tried to defend with her magic but it was ineffective. The thin white shield which appeared in the air was crushed by the sharp bone shafts.

'Oh my god, if I am hit by that many bones.....!'

He already only had 50% health left. If he was hit by the dozens of bones then he would die! It was highly likely when considering the attack power of the bones. Andel brightened as he saw Ark looking pale.

"Hahaha! Die Ark!"

'This bastard.....! Damn. If I'm going to die then I won't die politely! I'll take your life as well.'

Ark cursed before raising his cursed sword. There was only one attack Ark could do in this situation.

“Blade Tempest!”

The skill which had been paused for a bit finally activated! The cursed sword exploded into fragments and created a storm. Ark honestly wasn’t expecting this attack to work. He didn’t want to die like this so he wanted to do some damage to Andel. But it had an unexpected effect.

Chwa chwa chwa chwa! Chwa chwa chwa chwa!

When the sword fragments swirled around, the bone shafts surrounding Ark disappeared. No, to be exact it didn’t disappear. It moved at a quick speed and formed a shield around Andel. Therefore Andel didn’t receive any damage from Blade Tempest despite being in the range of the attack. However, it made it possible for Ark to salvage his life. But it didn’t just save Ark’s life.

‘What the? Chromatin’s reaction just now?’

Ark stared at Chromatin with surprise. Andel hadn’t given a command just then. Chromatin’s reaction was too fast to be anything but reflex.

‘Despite the fact that Blade Tempest could damage its body, its first instinct was to protect Andel!’

That’s right, he hadn’t been thinking about the target of his attacks! Ark’s eyes brightened as he had an idea. When attacking and defending against a monster, normally a certain pattern could be identified. But that was difficult against a user. The most significant difference between users and monsters was that the user could predict their opponent’s attacks. Previously Chromatin had sealed Ark and Shambala’s attacks by predicting it. Ark had thought that Chromatin was a difficult opponent but it was actually the combination of Andel + Chromatin that made it hard.

But the situation changed if Chromatin had to protect Andel. If Andel wasn’t there to raise Chromatin’s abilities then it would become

easier! That's right. Now the target for his attacks wasn't Chromatin but Andel. If he used Andel then it would be possible to block Chromatin's attacks. The question was how to capture Andel.....

Ark avoided the bones while visualizing the situation in his head. After a while, Ark narrowed his eyes at Andel before smiling. Okay, he would try that method!

-Shambala, I have a plan so please attract Chromatin's attention.

Ark explained to Shambala while using Feather of Whispering.

-You found a way to defeat it?

-Yes, a quite fun way.

-Hmm, I'll trust your plan.

“Seom, Torrential Sword!”

Shambala rushed to one side and violently attacked Chromatin. Chromatin shrieked and shot the bones towards him. All the nearby bones were focused on Shambala.

“Summon Demon, Razak. Transform!”

Razak appeared in an open space and changed into the Saw blade. Ark grabbed the Saw blade and threw it towards Andel.

“Razak, transformation off! Shield Stroke!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak returned to his skeletal form and raised his shield. This was Ark's plan. After nearing Chromatin, he planned to have Racard transform back and hit Andel with Shield Stroke and knocking Andel off Chromatin's body. However.....

“Heh, what a shallow plan!

The moment Racard flew in the air and was about to hit Andel with his shield. Andel just turned his head and laughed. At the same time, three bone shafts rose from the neck where Andel was sitting down. Razak hurriedly blocked with his shield but he was still blown back.

“Is it really like that?

Ark laughed and muttered. And then.....!

“Ohhhh, back attack strike! Dark Dash!”

Racard suddenly appeared from the sky and hit Razak’s body. And Razak flew away like a spiked volleyball towards Andel. Before Andel could react, Razak raised his shield and hit Andel’s face.

Clack clack clack clack, daengkang! “Kuak! What, what..... C-Chromatin.....!”

Andel who was hit in the face fell to the ground. Then Chromatin stopped attacking Shambala and sent the bones towards Ark. It’s first instinct was to protect Andel so it judged that it should attack Ark. Around 30 bone shafts flew towards Ark! But Ark had no interest in the bones.

“Don’t miss! Summon release, Razak! Summon Demon, Razak! Transform! Fly, Saw blade!”

Ark’s mouth recited the skills as quickly as possible. Razak who was on Chromatin’s neck changed into a blade and reappeared in Ark’s hand. Ark immediately switch to the whip and wrapped it around Andel’s leg. Andel was pulled along the slippery snowfield by the sword. Ark finally grabbed Andel’s collar and raised him in the air. At the same time, all the bones flying towards him stopped. Ark stared at the bones floating 1 metres away from him and laughed.

“It is like I thought.”

“You, you bastard.....!”

“Shut up!”

Popok, popopok!

Andel received a baptism of fists and blood dripped from his nose. Although he couldn't check Andel's information using Eyes of the Cat, as expected he was a lot weaker than Ark. It was impossible to think that Andel was higher than level 150. Ark was level 432 and with the dark attribute bonus he was level 648, so Andel was no match for him.

‘That's why Chromatin's top priority is to protect him.’

He didn't know what type of item or skill Andel and Alan had to control monsters. It even worked on a level 500 elite boss. But this was a crucial mistake in Andel's plan. Chromatin was programmed to instinctively protect him. That was why the bones stopped attacking when Ark grabbed Andel. If it attacked Ark then it would also attack Andel so it instinctively stopped.

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Then Chromatin roared and blew bones all over the area. The special forces screamed and rolled across the ground.

‘Huhuhu, is it running wild after losing its Master? Okay, then I'll return him.’

Ark grinned as he grabbed the handle of the whip. He grabbed the handle with both hands and began to spin it around. Andel's leg was still tied by the Saw blade so he was dragged into the air and spun around. It looked like the giant swing in wrestling.

‘Now, time to attack!’

Ark rotated the body and threw Andel towards the place where the special forces were. Andel's health decreased as he was hit by bones while flying through the sky. The Chromatin flinched and urgently stopped its bombing.

‘Kukukuku, now your attacks are blocked!

Ark smiled as Chromatin struck the ground with its paw. It was the Land mine attack which caused paralysis! However, the Land mine attack couldn't be used in conjunction with the bone attack so it had no effect. Ark just jumped to avoid the Land Mine. Then he raised the Saw blade and slammed Andel into the ground.

“Hiik, s-stop! Kiaaaaaah!”

Andel who was slammed upside down into the ground also became paralyzed. Ark started swinging Andel again and shouted.

“Now, don't worry about Chromatin's attacks and just attack it!”

Before they couldn't even walk let along attack because of the hundreds of bones but now the situation had changed. Ark's whip turned Andel into a 20 metre shield which completely blocked the bone attack. Chromatin couldn't attack so it was just a pile of bones.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“Smash! Chain Strike! Heroic Strike!”

“Thunderbolt, thunderbolt, destroy the enemy! Thunder Break!”

“Bone Crusher Arrow!”

The soldiers used various special attacks on Chromatin. The swords and maces, arrows and various magic drained Chromatin's health. 90%, 80%, 70%..... Chromatin couldn't even oppose when its health decreased.

‘But I can't defeat Chromatin like this.’

Ark looked down at the ragged looking Andel. The reason Andel became so ragged was because Ark deliberately moved him to the side of the bone attacks to block Chromatin from attacking. Despite Chromatin hurriedly stopping its bones, Andel still received some damage. But there was another larger reason.....

“Ack, t..... This bastard.....s.....stop.....!”

Andel tried to talk despite having the Saw blade wrapped around his leg.

“Shut up!”

Ark shouted and slammed Andel into the ground again. Andel was hit on the head and stiffened. He was a warrior receiving fall damage so he became ‘stunned.’ That’s right. This was the reason why Andel was so tattered. The Saw blade was securely tied but Andel was a user.

Therefore he had to focus on the Saw blade and he stunned Andel every time he regained himself. Of course, this was only possible because Andel was level 150.

“You.....you..... th.....bastard.....!”

In the end, Andel’s face armour was crumbled like a piece of paper and his face was discoloured.

‘Well, it seems like Andel is almost about to break.....’

He couldn’t confirm Andel’s health using Eyes of the Cat but he seemed to be in a critical condition. If Andel died then the way to stop Chromatin’s attacks would also disappear. However, he couldn’t stop slamming Andel into the ground.

‘I’m sorry but I need you alive until Chromatin is defeated.’

Therefore he needed the priests to cast recovery magic!

“The Great God’s ability, Great Heal!”

The priests poured their recovery magic on Andel. Therefore Andel’s tattered body was restored. And he was struck before he could do anything.

“Now, continuously attack!”

Ark continued to swing Andel around and shouted. After a short time, the Chromatin's health fell down to 20% without it even resisting. Then the crumpled Andel regained his spirit again. Andel waited until Ark was about to slam him and took out a small glass bead before breaking it.

"T-this.....if I have to go like this.....I'd rather.....release..... Soul Chain Release!"

When the bead broke, Chromatin suddenly stirred and withdrew. The black light around it slowly turned red and the bones started flying.

'That bastard?'

Ark waited for the bones to stop moving. But this time something was different. Chromatin didn't stop the bones flying towards Andel. The bones perforated Andel's body.

-A level 150 chaotic player has been killed.

<Fame +3>

The level 150 Andel went to the afterlife with one blow.

'What the? Chromatin attacked Andel..... Then the item Andel just broke was the one controlling Chromatin? Damn, it must be one of the black code items that Global Exos talked about.....'

The previous incident had been caused by the black code items. If Andel really had the black code items then he could've obtained 1 billion won from Global Exos. Of course, the item that Alan had might be the black code item but wasn't it a chance to get a clue to obtain the 1 billion won?

'But it's already broken so it can't be helped. The problem right now is.....'

Kurwarwarwarwa!

Chromatin had been released from the soul restraint. He couldn't use the Andel shield anymore and Chromatin still had 20% health left.

Furthermore, Chromatin was now insane. Ark looked at Chromatin's movements and muttered.

"Chromatin's movements is different from before."

While Andel was alive it kept on shooting the hundreds of bones but now it was just attacking randomly. It had gone completely insane after the soul restrain had been released.

'This is enough to give it a try!'

He had the members with a 2nd profession surround Chromatin. Ark, Shambala and 5 other members surrounded Chromatin and used Area Declaration.

"Area Declaration, River of Blood!"

"Area Declaration, Garden of the Warriors!"

"Area Declaration, Magic Space!"

Various Area Declarations were exercised around Chromatin. The earth around Shambala changed into a river of blood which increased his attack and defense by 50%. Meanwhile a muscular angel appeared in the warrior's area and blew a horn to increase various stats. The mana concentrations in the magician's Area Declaration increased and they could use various high ranking magic more easily. But there was one ultimate Area Declaration.

"Area Declaration, Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Hwarrruk!

Ark stuck the Saw blade into the ground and change to the Promised Sword before running towards Chromatin. He avoided the bones and slid under Chromatin's belly before using the skill and a dark spirit rose from the ground. At the same time the area was wrapped in darkness. But then flames soared upwards from the dark area. The flames formed a Fire Draconian! The Fire Draconian flew upwards

before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark's head. Ark was wrapped in the flames. Every time he breathed out, flames 10 centimetres long shot from his mouth.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.
- * Attack speed at the skill and speed, reaction speed will increase by 50%.
- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

“It is in a critical condition. Attack it with everything you have!”

Ark breathed out flames and shouted, causing the soldiers to run up and wield their weapons. Chromatin shrieked and used Land Mine and the bone attack randomly. But the members who used Area Declaration around Chromatin blocked more than 50% of those attacks.

“Take this, Dark Blade!”

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwa!

Ark bombarded the Chromatin with his attacks. But Chromatin who had escaped from its restraints wasn't an insignificant rival. Although it was under attack, it managed to counterattack against the special forces. The special forces tried to decrease Chromatin's 20% health before the Area Declarations ran out.

‘Damn! That useless Andel put me in this position.....If we can’t knock it down before the Area Declarations end then the situation will become more serious!’

“Radun, the best magic sword! Blade Tempest!”

Ark caught the sword Radun spat out and made it explode. The effect of Descent of the Fire Draconian was applied to Blade Tempest and a whirlwind of fire hit Chromatin. Chromatin’s bones instantly split apart and its health ran out. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Chromatin’s health has fallen below 3% and you can extract the demonic aura.

“That’s it! Demonic Seal!” Ark used Demonic Seal without thinking.

Chwajijijijiik!

Light shot from Ark’s hand and penetrated Chromatin’s chest. Then the black soul was forcibly dragged out by the light.

“Okay. Radun, equipment!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun opened his mouth and spat out a piece of armour. Ark immediately shoved Chromatin’s soul into the armour. But before he could sigh with relief, the armour crumbled and the soul popped out. And it flickered and tried to return to Chromatin’s body?

“What, what the? D-Demonic Seal!”

Ark hurriedly used Demonic Seal and captured Chromatin’s soul again. And he realized there was a significant problem he forgot.

‘Dammit.....!’

Ark had forgotten about the success rate of Demonic Seal. In order for Demonic Seal to have a 80~90% chance of success, the item level should be at a similar level to the monster. In other words, he needed a level 500 equipment in order to be able to properly seal Chromatin. However, Ark currently only had equipment around level 300~400. It meant the probability of success was almost nil.

‘There’s the Hell’s Shoulder Blades.....’

It was the shoulder blades he obtained from Magura! It had a level restriction of 450 so Ark couldn’t wear it yet. But there was still a 50 level difference so the probability of success was only 50%. And the Hell’s Shoulders Blades was a unique item. If the demonic aura was sealed into a unique item then didn’t it mean he couldn’t repair it?

‘If the seal fails.....’

He didn’t even want to imagine the result.

‘If the soul returns to the body then I won’t be able to catch it again.’

When the soul pulled using Demonic Seal returned to the body, the monster was revived with 30~50% of its health. They had barely managed to reduce its health down from 20% using the Area Declarations. If it was restored with 30~50% health, the Area Declaration couldn’t be used anymore so there was no way to kill it.

‘Besides, it has been 30 minutes since the battle started. I have to end the fight with Chromatin now or else Alan will arrive from the underground base!’

Ark was completely lost.

-There is 1 minute left on Demonic Seal.

A warning message flashed in front of Ark.

‘Damn, I can’t let it return to its body. There must be a chance even if the success rate is 1%.....’

“Radun, give me all the equipment up to level 400!”

Radun opened his mouth and vomited out all the equipment. Ark shoved Chromatin's soul into the equipment. However.....

Peng, peng, peng, peng!

The level 230~350 equipment just exploded. Ark was close to tears with every explosion. But the result would be even worse if he allowed the soul to return to the body! Ark had no choice so he closed his eyes and shoved Chromatin's soul into random equipment. With every backlash he felt like Chromatin was getting stronger. Ark who was using Demonic Seal desperately opened his eyes and looked down. It was in order to confirm the equipment left. But Ark's face became confused the moment he checked the equipment.

“Heok! What, what the? That fellow is near the soul.....?”

Chromatin's soul was near a sword that was plunged into the ground. It was the Saw blade that he had plunged there and forgotten about after Andel died.

‘W-will this blade explode as well?’

Wasn't the Saw blade a joining of the sword and Razak? No, he would be worried even if it was possible to use Demonic Seal on it. When Demonic Seal was used, the power of the equipment increased by leaps and bounds. But the endurance would fall by a lot and it will be difficult to repair. If that effect was applied then who knew what would happen to Razak?

‘..... Oh my god! What type of position is this?’

Ark stared with a pale face at the Saw blade. But it was too late. Chromatin's soul couldn't be captured if it returned to its body so Ark shoved the soul into the Saw Blade.

Jjajang~~~! Jjajajajang~~~!

It was at that moment. Cracks started to spread on the surface of the blade. And after a while, the sword suddenly shattered?

“Ah, no! U-unbelievable.....really.....!”

Ark murmured with a soulless voice at the sight of the shattered fragments. The Saw blade had been destroyed. Didn't that mean Chromatin's sealing had failed and even Razak had disappeared? The idea sent Ark into a complete panic. But the next moment an unimaginable scene occurred in front of Ark. The fragments scattered seemed to fly backwards as if time rewound and the sword reformed? But it wasn't the previous Saw Blade. Although the previous Saw blade was a one-handed sword, this one was an enormous greatsword 30 centimetres wide and 150 centimetres long.

“What, what the? This sword? What happened?”

Ark looked at the sword with bemused eyes.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

The message windows rose in front of him. He had gained 7 levels.....As soon as his level was adjusted Chromatin's body instantly collapsed, leaving behind a part of the spine.

-Chromatin's Lance (Unique)

Weapon type: Two-Handed Lance

Damage: 45-55

Durability: 53/120

Weight: 60

User Restriction: Level 450 or more

A lance made from the spine of Chromatin. Since dragon is a high class material, this lance is light and firm compared to ordinary lances. Since this is made from Chromatin's bone, it is imbued with its power and the 'Bone Thorn' attack can be used. It is the best weapon for a knight.

<Option: Strength +20, Agility +10>

<Special Option (Bone Thorn Attack) This attack launches 10~20 bones from the lance. The flying bones can be controlling through the movement of the lance.

Mana consumption: 100 Cool down time: 1 hour>

A unique lance! It was a lance which had an obviously high value just by looking at it. However, Ark didn't have time to look at the abilities of Chromatin's Lance.

"Radun, swallow the spear!"

Ark gave the command to Radun and hurriedly ran to the Saw blade. He wanted to check what happened to it so he grabbed the handle. An information window rose in front of him along with some crafty laughter.

-Your summon Razak has successfully absorbed the soul.

The dragon Chromatin which has been changed to a soul state and weakened has been successfully absorbed the physical body reorganized.

Razak has absorbed the soul of a death master several levels higher and he has evolved to a higher profession 'Death Lord.' Through this spiritual awakening, Razak has been renamed to 'Purital.'

'Evolution? He evolved?'

Ark looked at the information window with stunned eyes. Although he was confused, Ark was soon able to understand most of the situation.

'Chromatin is an undead dragon which is the strongest among the undead series.'

If Racard absorbed the soul of the strongest monster which had been weakened then wouldn't he evolve?'

When he thought back, the essential part to evolving to Death Master was obtaining the Necromancer's skeleton. Racard also absorbed Karakul's blood to evolve into a higher ranking vampire. In other words, evolution involved absorbing a monster with the same properties. Ark's eyes shone brilliantly at the thought. What he thought was Demonic Seal failing was actually his pet's evolution! Razak's original features had been changed by the evolution.

Just like the sword had changed, Purital also looked different. The surface of the bones were carved with patterns that looked like dragon scales while there were sharp horns in the joints such as the arms, shoulders and knees. When Purital transformed, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

Purital

A skeleton who has evolved into the highest rank of the death property 'Death Lord' after absorbing an undead dragon.

'Death Lord' is a knight who takes pride in his military exploits and being his Master's sword and shield is the biggest honour. So the skills of a 'Death Lord' is concentrated on raising the abilities of his Master.

Race	Demonic	Alignment	Dark
Ranking	Middle Class		
Health	5,720 (+ 500)	Loyalty	1,589 (+100)
Strength	712 (+50)	Agility	256 (+30)

Stamina	753 (+500)	Wisdom	74 (+20)
Intelligence	78 (+30)	Luck	89 (+20)

* Bone Blade damage increased by 15, Durability by 100 and the attack range is increased by 5 metres.

-You have learnt the 'Clad Armour' skill.

-You have learnt the 'Hook Explosion' skill.

-Clad Armour (Beginner, Species Characteristics):

Purital will take his body apart and become his Master's armour. When clad with the armour, 30% of Purital's health, defense and attack will be applied to the user. However, if the increased health is consumed then the skill will automatically be cancelled and Purital can't be summoned for 24 hours.

<Purital will become armour and 30% of Purital's health, defense and attack will be applied to the user.

Spiritual Power consumption: 200 Cool down time: 24 hours>

-Hook Explosion <When under the effect of Clad Armour> (Beginner, Species Characteristics):

When the user is clad with Purital, the hooks on each of his joints will grab the enemy and explode. Each explosion will deal 50~100 damage to enemies and they will then be pulled to the user.

<Deals 50~100 damage to the enemy and has a 'grab' effect.

Mana consumption: 100>

'Clad Armour?'

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the information window. Purital could change into a sword and now he could change into an armour. But the sword transformation was completely different from Clad Armour. It was a battle armour created using Purital. And 30% of

Purital's health, defense and attack would be applied to Ark. Purital was currently around level 300 so 30% of his health, defense and attack meant that his abilities increased by approximately 90 levels.

'I would love to look at it in more detail.....'

He could check the skill information of his pets at any time. His pet had evolved safely so he could look at it later. Chromatin was defeated so he had to quickly blow up the Black Obelisk Forest.

'It's been 40 minutes since the battle with Chromatin started. Combined with the time consumed in the canyon, that is 55 minutes. Alan is likely already heading here after escaping from the underground base. Our health and mana is already low from fighting Chromatin so we would be no match against Alan's group. I have to destroy the Black Obelisk Forest and quickly escape to Shangri-La!'

Ark estimated the time and quickly shouted towards the special forces.

"Quickly install the Starlight Bombs!"

And after 10 minutes.....

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Starlight Bombs installed on the obelisks exploded. Cracks spread over the black obelisk and they crumbled into fine sand. It was 50 obelisks! Now the monsters at Pabium Fortress couldn't be resurrected anymore. He finally accomplished the <Blow up the Black Obelisk Forest> operation. The only thing left was for the Schudenberg expedition to capture the fortress!

"Racard, fly to the base and tell them the operation was a success. Quickly!"

"Yes!"

Racard saluted and flew the shortest path to the base. But it still wasn't over.

“Wormer, hurry up!”

“Understood, understood!”

Wormer ran into the Black Obelisk Forest and took out the kettle (magic converter). He poured the black sand into the kettle and the magic battery became brighter and stronger. While Wormer was still gathering the MG.

“Ark, it’s them!”

Ark’s face stiffened as he turned his head. Thousands of monsters were heading from the canyon towards them. At the forefront of the group was a black knight.....

Act 9: Shangri-La

“.....Alan!”

Ark muttered as he bit his lip. That’s right. Alan had escaped the underground base and gathered the monsters in the canyon.

“Dammit! Wormer, is it almost ready yet?”

“Close.....okay. The MG has been collected!”

“Then? Where is the thing?”

“My invention is near the underground base.”

“Huh?”

Ark stared at Wormer with a stupid expression. Then they had to go through that huge number of monsters to enter the canyon again? But he only had 20 cursed japttem left.

‘I can’t use Demonic Distortion.’

He would need at least 200~300 cursed japtém to move those many monsters.

“You should’ve told me that earlier!”

“Shouldn’t you have known by my words? Did you think I could carry my amazing invention in my backpack?”

Wormer answered naturally. Then he closed his mouth and acted like he was remembering something.

“Ah, that’s right. Didn’t I develop that device before?”

Wormer placed his entire head in his bag before pulling something out. The machine looked just like a radio but it had an antenna which looked like a satellite dish on top.

-Magic Energy Remote Transmitter

The magic energy converted to MG while transmit an energy wave to a machine a long distance away. Although the machine which stopped working can be charged with the energy from a distance away, some energy will be lost due to the wireless transfer.

“Hahaha, I really am a genius!”

Wormer laughed as he held the remote transmitter. Ark asked Wormer after hearing the explanation of the remote transmitter.

“If the invention has its energy charged then it can be brought here?”

“Yes, I possess the remote control for the invention so it won’t be a problem.”

“But doesn’t the invention have to move through the canyon to get here?”

“Don’t worry about it. I can definitely bring it here after the energy is charged.”

“I’ll believe you. How long will it take to transfer the energy and get here?”

“My estimate is 5~10 minutes.”

“5~10 minutes.....!”

Ark looked at the swarm of monsters and sighed. They had to endure against Alan, Timosi and the thousands of monsters for 5~10 minutes. There were only 100 soldiers left because 30 had died in the battle against Chromatin.

‘But.....!’

Ark looked at the canyon. The Black Obelisk Forest could be reached from the path in the middle of the canyon. In other words, there was a ravine on the left and right and Alan was coming from one of them. On the other side was a narrow entrance into another canyon.

“Everybody move to that canyon!”

Ark shouted. The special forces followed Ark’s order and moved towards the entrance of the canyon.

“Warriors make a defense formation behind the entrance!”

There was a reason Ark moved to this canyon. Wormer needed coordinates to input into his invention so they couldn’t excessively run away. Therefore they had to fight for 5~10 minutes. If they were unable to hold out against the numerous monsters then they would be wiped out in a few minutes. But the canyon entrance was narrow enough that only 10 warriors could fit standing side by side. This meant that if they established a defense formation inside the canyon then they could restrict the number of enemies that entered. It was a basic strategy which involved the terrain.

“Ark!”

Alan's voice was heard while they were making the defense camp. Alan looked like an evil spirit. It was reasonable. He had been deceived by Ark and trapped in the underground base so now he wasn't in the proper mental state. But that wasn't the only reason for Alan's fury. Alan had received the mission from the Red Man to defend Pabiun Fortress and steal the artifact from Shangri-La. There were two goals. However the Black Obelisk Forest had been blown up. It would be difficult for Alan to defend Pabiun Fortress against the Schudenberg expedition. If Pabiun Fortress was taken away then Shangri-La would also fall into the hands of the Schudenberg expedition.

"Ark, Ark, Ark! I will kill you no matter what!"

Alan muttered before shouting.

"Kill them all!"

Kuaaaaaah, kuaaaaaah!

Thousands of creatures with glossy eyes ran into the canyon. Ark carefully observed them before giving a command.

"Magician unit, slide!"

"Make their path uncomfortable.....Slide!"

10 magicians simultaneously unleashed their spells. Slide turned the floor slippery like ice allowing zero friction. When the magic was used on the snowfield, the monsters instantly started falling.

"Now! Archers intercept the monsters that didn't fall!"

The archers followed up by continuously shooting blunt arrows. The damage wasn't strong but it had the same effect as blunt weapons. The monsters were hit with the blunt arrows and combined with the slippery floor, it caused the monsters to be pushed back dozens of metres. Ark intended to use this method to block the monsters during the time limit. If they were ordinary monsters then he easily could've survived 5~10 minutes. However there was a user leading the monsters.

“Bah, he’s just a cornered rat. Monster troop, make footholds with your bodies!”

Hundreds of monsters immediately lay down on the ground after hearing Alan’s command. Other monsters stepped on them before lying down in front. After that repeated a few times, the space between the monsters and the special forces was covered. Slide wasn’t applied to the monsters stepping on their colleagues so the blunt arrows didn’t have an effect anymore.

“Damn! Warriors, prepare to defend!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Eventually the monsters entered and collided with the special forces. Violent clashing sounds were heard at the same time. If this was a wide open space then the defense formation would be quickly destroyed. But even if they overcame Slide, only a few monsters were allowed to enter at a time. The special forces members were also elite troops from the expedition so they were able to hold up to a certain extent. However.....

“Get out of the way, you stupid things! Hate Aura!”

“I’ll go too! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

The situation immediately changed after Alan and Timosi ran through the monsters. With his attack and defense raised by the black aura around him, the warriors trying to block with their shields stumbled and fell. Timosi’s quick arrows also penetrated the shields and damaged the soldiers.

“Damn, those guys are always a problem.”

“Ark, I’ll take care of that female! Torrential Sword!”

Shambala cleared the barrier and engaged Timosi. Timosi avoided the dagger with a somersault and taunted.

“Oh, it’s you again? Are you really that attracted to me?”

“It’s the opposite. It’s to the extent that I want to kill you. Burnt Sword.”

“Your method of expressing affection is too extreme. Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil Chasing Arrow!”

Syu syu syu syuk!

Shambala and Timosi flew violently around the canyon.

“Then my opponent is that guy?”

Ark muttered as he looked at Alan. Ark had already been pushed back by Alan while they were fighting in the destroyed Nuran village. But he didn’t know that Alan could use various skills from monsters and was hit by various abnormal conditions. Well, there was also Alan’s Hate Aura but Ark was less concerned about that now.

“This is a chance to practice the new skills. Purital, Clad Armour!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

It was at that moment. Purital had been participating in the defense formation when his body exploded and disassembled into pieces. The pieces flew towards Ark and began to snap into place around him. After a moment, an armour of bone was formed around Ark.

-You have used Clad Armour.

* Damage will increase by 17~22.

* Defense will increase by 98.

* Health will increase by 1,866.

<If the 1,866 health is consumed then Clad Armour will automatically dismantle>

When he checked his health gauge, the 1,866 health was marked in yellow. If the yellow gauge disappeared then Clad Armour would also be gone.

‘The attack and defense didn’t go up as much as I expected.’

Ark had thought Clad Armour was based on his stats. But after thinking about it, he realized that it was actually 30% of Purital’s stats. Purital didn’t have much equipment so his attack and defense wasn’t as high as his stats.

‘But this alone should be enough to handle Alan!’

“Hook Explosion!”

Ark fixed his gaze on Alan and shouted. Then the hooks on the shoulders and knees of his armour shot across the area towards Alan. Alan received damage and was pulled like elastic towards Ark.

“What, what the?”

“Are you wondering what is going on? It is revenge! Dark Blade!”

“Impudent bastard! The Devil’s Fang!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A tremendous shock wave shook the area as both swords collided. When they fought in Nuran village, the ratio was 6:4 with Ark at a disadvantage. Now it was different. Thanks to the 30% bonus from Clad Armour, it was an even match. Both Alan and Ark took a few steps back from the shockwave.

“Ugh, how did you suddenly become like this?”

“It is a secret you idiot!”

Ark continuously attacked until Alan opened his mouth.

“Devil’s Breath!”

It was the poisonous fog which couldn't be cured without an antidote. Ark turned to the side using Dark Dance and attacked Alan again. Then Alan started to display his 'Predator of Devils' ability as he used random monster skills. Ark and Alan's battle was almost equal. Ark had levelled out their abilities using Clad Armour. When it came to actual fighting ability, Ark with his taekwondo was clearly superior. It was natural to think that Ark could control Alan but Alan had his 'Predator of Devils' ability.

'Damn! How did that bastard get so strong?'

Both of them had the same thought while fighting. But if they looked at the whole situation then Alan clearly had the upper hand. The priests still hadn't recovered all the mana after fighting against Chromatin so the warriors were started to collapse from the monsters' attacks. The archers and magicians were also spreading some damage from the rear. The White Tiger clan were also struggling so Ark's group wouldn't be able to hold on much longer.

'Even the White Tigers are going to collapse soon!'

Ark sighed after surveying the military situation while still fighting Alan. Then Wormer who had just been looking at his remote control raised his head and shouted.

"That's it. There it is!"

The special forces turned their gazes to Wormer's invention in unison. The monsters also reflexively turned to look. Then it seemed like the users, monsters and NPCs gathered at the canyon were turned to stone.

Kuoooooh-!

Something enormous was flying in a straight line. It was an enormous human shaped object 40 metres large. The arms and limbs of the huge object seemed to be made of iron metal. In other words, it was a giant made of steel.....

That's right. Wormer had amazingly created a robot from an animated cartoon.

"Hahaha, a giant flying robot! It is the dream of all men!"

Wormer jumped up while holding the remote control. The users never imagined that they would see a robot in the game so their expressions looked like their souls had left them. The robot receiving the shocked looks crossed the canyon and descended behind the special forces. From up close it really resembled a robot from an animated cartoon. Wormer dived between the spread toes of the robot and shouted.

"This is the entrance. Get on the robot!"

"Wait? If we have a robot like this then isn't it unnecessary to run away?"

"Does it have beams or rockets or something?"

"You idiot, why would I attach weapons to my robot?"

Wormer shouted in a pained voice.

"All residents board first then the special forces!"

"I won't miss!"

Alan rushed up to Ark while he was giving orders to the special forces. Then the robot suddenly stuck its huge fist in the area between Alan and Ark. There was a huge roaring sound and snow fell from the sky. At that moment, Ark used a combination of Dark Dance and Sprint to enter between the toes of the giant robot.

"This way!"

Shambala and Lariette who had gone inside first beckoned from a machine which looked like an elevator. Ark rolled his body to avoid Alan's Evil Insight and there was a metallic sound as the toes closed up.

"This.....attack! Smash a hole in that iron!"

Alan shouted angrily.

Ku ku ku ku, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The monsters swarmed around the robot's foot when a huge storm suddenly occurred. Jet flames emerged from the soles of the feet and the robot soared into the sky at an absurd speed.

"Dandarararara dandada dandarararara dandada."

All users under 20 years old would know the theme song for Taekwon V was emerging from Wormer's mouth.

Including Ark, the special forces, White Tiger Clan and the Nuran residents, there were a total of 110 people on board the Taekwon V. 70 of the elite forces had died during the fight in the canyon and only 40 people remained from the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents. However, the robot successfully flew through the sky and they safely escaped from Alan and the monsters. It was flying among the mountain ranges under the guidance of the White Tiger clan.

"Shangri-La!"

One of the White Tiger clan members looking outside through a monitor shouted.

"That is Shangri-La where the prophet clan lives.....!"

Ark turned his eyes towards the place where the White Tiger pointed and saw Shangri-La. At that moment, he could see why the White Tiger clan said that Shangri-La wasn't accessible to the outside. Shangri-La was originally located deep within the forest on the mountain. But thanks to the wards that the 7 heroes placed, it was now a floating island. It was impossible to reach Shangri-La unless they flew through the air. Shambala surveyed the area then asked with a frown.

“What are those things gathered over there?”

Shambala pointed towards a place where black shadows were flying like a dark cloud. Wormer zoomed in on the ground and shouted.

“Demonic monsters! It is a swarm of flying monsters!”

They confirmed on the screen that the dark cloud was filled with hundreds of gargoyles. They were like the ancient stone statues placed in dungeons or castles that attacked passing travellers. Those creatures were probably sent in order to attack Shangri-La. The gargoyles spotted the unidentified robot approaching Shangri-La and started attacking. However, unlike its outer appearance the robot didn't have any weapons. It quickly became tattered under the attack of the sky monsters.

“Wormer, increase the speed!”

“We're flying at the top speed!”

Wormer answered with an urgent expression.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Then there was a loud roaring sound and the whole cockpit shook. The gargoyles shot narrow beams from their mouths and started to attack the robot. A red light in the room started ringing like an emergency bell. Wormer grabbed his hair and started screaming.

“Ack! The arm has been broken. Huck, the leg is on fire! Dammit, I spent several months making this so what are they doing to my Taekwon V? Do you know how much effort I placed into this?”

‘Damn, if the robot is that valuable then you should've attached some cannons to it!’

He really wanted to snap those words out. But what was the point? Ark grabbed the instrument panel as the cockpit shook roughly and asked Wormer.

“Ugh, can we reach Shangri-La while being attacked like this?”

“It’s not a problem. Taekwon V has a secondary engine in cases of emergency.....ack!”

Wormer once again pulled his hair and screamed.

“What’s wrong?”

“.....The secondary engine was destroyed a while ago.”

“What now.....?”

“.....We’ll fall.”

Wormer stared blankly at the monitor and muttered.

“Damn.....How much.....I spent making this.....uwooo!”

“I don’t care about the robot. There’s 100 metres left to reach Shangri-La so we can’t just crash here. Something, isn’t there another way?”

Ark grabbed Wormer’s collar who trembled and replied.

“Dammit, damn, I didn’t want to use this..... It can’t be helped. Everybody climb up that ladder!”

“What’s at the top?”

“There’s no time to explain. Do you want to crash to the ground and die?”

He had no intention of committing suicide with the robot. Ark ordered everyone in his group to climb up the ladder. Then Wormer climbed after them and took something out from underneath the pilot’s seat. Wormer turned several switches before pressing a red button.

“Emergency escape!”

At the same time, there was a huge vibration and the head of the robot was launched like a rocket. Ark and his companions were in the

emergency escape pod of Taekwon V's head. Wormer looked back at the black smoke spouting from the robot with tearful eyes. And he pressed a skull shaped button attached to one side of the cockpit.

“Goodbye Taekwon V1!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Fire appeared in different parts of the robot and it exploded. When it exploded, all gargoyles within 40 metres of it were turned into grey powder. But even the destruction of the robot couldn't wipe out all the gargoyles. Hundreds of gargoyles immediately chased after the separated head. The top of the head was crushed from an attack and it instantly became bald.

-The escape pod has received an attack and the durability has decreased to 80%.

The engine has caught on fire and the temperature of the escape pod is rapidly rising.

The red warning message appeared on the monitor.

“Hiiik, the escape pod is overheating. If we continuing being hit then the escape pod will explode before it reaches Shangri-La!”

Wormer trembled as he looked at the dashboard. Like he said, some parts of the escape pod already had holes in it. The only thing Ark could do was block the gaps and maintain the balance of the pod.

‘Damn, Shangri-La is almost in sight.....!’

Ark moaned as he looked at Shangri-La that was only a few metres away.

Kwajijiji! Kwajijiji! Kwajijiji!

A giant crystal ball on top of a tower in Shangri-La started emitting something. Deep blue sparks occurred inside the crystal ball until it

gathered in one spot. Then dozens of lightning bolts shot from the crystal ball and hit the gargoyles surrounding the escape pod. The gargoyles' health quickly decreased. A White Tiger witnessing the scene shouted.

"That's it! We've entered the boundaries of Shangri-La's defense ward!"

"Everybody hold on tight. We're about to land!"

The escape pod that had barely escaped from the gargoyles fell towards Shangri-La.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang.

The escape pod hit Shangri-La and skidded a few metres. At the same time, the dashboards that received the impact burst into flames. Wormer ran to the exit of the cockpit and shouted.

"What are you doing? Hurry up! It will explode soon!"

"What, what the?"

Ark, Shambala, Lariette, the special forces, the White Tiger clan and the Nuran residents rushed to the exit. They all yelled and escaped from the pod in a stampede.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The escape pod emitted black smoke and finally exploded.

"Phew.....That was really crazy. However we've arrived at Shangri-La."

Ark looked at the flaming escape pod and wiped off the sweat. Then he turned to look at Shangri-La. They were in the forest around Shangri-La. The White Tiger clan looked around before heading to the front and saying.

"The tower of the prophet clan is this way."

The White Tiger clan led Ark's group through the forest. How much time had passed? Suddenly a huge tower caught their eye. The tower was white like snow. Hundreds of NPCs were gathered in front of the tower. The majority of them were the White Tiger clan who defended Shangri-La but 20 of them were wearing hoods. When Ark and his companions emerged, they placed both hands on the chests and bowed.

"Welcome. Ark-nim."

"You knew I was coming?"

"Yes, we saw your appearance a while ago through the Truth Crystal."

"Truth Crystal?"

"The crystal is associated with the divine will of the Great God. A while ago we saw you defeating the dragon Chromatin that threatened Shangri-La and that were you coming here."

"The dragon Chromatin was threatening Shangri-La?"

Ark now knew the reason why Andel suddenly appeared at the canyon exit. One of Alan's goals was to steal the artifact from Shangri-La. However, Shangri-La had now become a floating island so ordinary monsters were unable to penetrate its defences. Therefore Alan mobilized flying type monsters to capture Shangri-La. That's why there were no flying monsters at Pabiun Canyon. And the most powerful flying monster threatening Shangri-La was the undead dragon that Andel controlled. But after Alan was trapped in the underground base he instantly called Andel to stop Ark.

'Then I ended up saving Shangri-La because I killed Chromatin and Andel?'

But Ark had no interest in such a thing. He just wanted to receive the compensation for the <Witness the Legend> quest now.

"The reason I came here is to receive the revelation of the stars."

“We’re aware of that. Then follow me.”

As expected, there was no need to explain to the prophet clan. Ark’s group entered the tower along with the prophet clan. Inside the white tower were huge crystals the size of a door lined up. The prophet explained that each memory crystal contained 10 years of the continent’s history. There were hundreds of the crystals so thousands of years’ worth of New World’s history was recorded here.

“The other people please wait here.”

The prophets told the special forces once they reached the end of the passage. They then opened an enormous door and entered a giant hall accompanied by only Ark. The walls of the whole hall were formed using cylindrical shaped memory crystals. But there wasn’t just one. Crystal slabs the size of a small book lined the walls. There were millions of these crystal slabs were inserted into the cylindrical holes.

“The memory crystals in this room contain all the information on the foreigners.”

“Foreigners?

“At the end of the Dark Century.....the Great God showed us a horrible prediction through the Truth Crystal. Although the dark forces threatening the world had disappeared, one day it would appear again and it would lead this world to destruction.”

The prophets suddenly began a history lecture out of nowhere. At that time, the 7 heroes who destroyed the Dark Lord had gathered and heard the prediction of the Truth Crystal and fell into despair. However, there was also light in the darkness. The Truth Crystal showed a glimmer of hope to those who were in despair. Brave and wise visitors from another world would appear in this world. And they would have the power to stop the resurrection of the dark forces. So the 7 heroes planned to pass on their powers to the foreigners in the hope of stopping this evil. That was why only users could be the descendants of the 7 heroes.

“And 100 heroes who heard the prophecy also arranged to help the foreigners

“100 heroes?”

“Yes, 100 heroes who fought against the darkness under the 7 heroes’ command. They heard the prophecy and left their own equipment behind in order to help the foreigners fight against the dark forces. But if the dark forces gained these equipment then it would change to the darkness and be used to damage us. Because these equipment were made using ancient techniques.”

“Then the Hero Stars.....?”

The White Tiger clan called the stars Ark received from the Lore quests Hero Stars. Did that mean he would receive one of the 100 equipment for the Hero Stars?

“One of the 7 heroes, the great magician Norad used powerful magic that transcended time and space to create the Hero Stars. Those who fight against the darkness hidden in the world will accumulate the Hero Stars in their body. When it accumulates in their body, they will head to Shangri-La to receive the heritage that the 100 heroes left behind.”

Every time he completed a Lore quest, the stars would accumulate in his body! But Ark had no interest in such things. The important thing was that if he gathered these stars then he could gain the strong equipment that the 100 heroes used. Ark had headed towards Shangri-La because he received the Hero Stars.

“Then.....?”

“Ark.”

When Ark opened his mouth to talk, the prophet murmured in a low voice. Then a huge wall moved and a crystal slab moved in front of the prophet. The crystal slab had 10 jewels embedded in it. A prophet approached Ark holding the crystal slab. “This is the memory crystal

where your record is written." Ark's information started to appear on the crystal slab.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human		
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baron		
Fame	21,788 (+500)	Level	439		
Profession		Dark Soul			
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero			
Health	8,125 (+475)	Mana	8,315(+225)		
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	844		
Agility	1,139 (+90)	Stamina	1,379 (+45)		
Wisdom	205 (+10)	Intelligence	1,517 (+5)		
Luck	209 (+60)	Flexibility	268		
Art of Communication	79	Affection	129 (+10)		
Resilience	483	Dark Fog	74		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		233			
* Equipment item effects					
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute					

Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available

*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40

Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic Protection' is automatically activated when health is less than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased

by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

[Hero Stars]

☆☆☆: Sealed Gates of Hell in the Underground World

☆☆☆☆: Resurrection of Seutandal's World Tree, Yuzuria

☆☆☆ : Extermination of the Devil Magura

The prophet looked down at the crystal slab and said.

"The Jewels embedded in the slab represent the achievements you did to receive the Hero Stars. This is the proof that you are qualified to receive the 100 heroes' legacy. The Hero Stars will give you the legacy which suits your abilities. However there is something you should pay attention to. Naturally 100 legacies exist. All of them have incredible power but it also depends on the differences in abilities of each of the 100 heroes. The Hero Stars will give you the equipment best suited for your abilities at the moment. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He couldn't understand the words at first. But he started to guess after thinking about the prophet's words. The 100 equipment had various restriction levels. So the user would only receive the equipment which matched their level when they arrived at Shangri-La. In other words, if Ark was level 100 then he would receive a level 100 equipment and so on. If he raised his level then he could receive higher levelled equipment!

But Ark didn't worry too much about it.

'If I wait then I can get better equipment. But.....'

Ark raised his head and looked at the huge amount of crystal slabs inserted into the holes in the wall. There were at least 10 slabs inserted with 7~8 jewels. This meant Ark wasn't the only user collecting stars.

'The 100 heroes only left being 100 legacies. I don't know when I will be able to receive the compensation again. If I wait in order to become greedy for better equipment then other users might fill all the stars and my share will disappear. No, postponing my reward for another day isn't my style.'

Ark nodded without any hesitation.

"I would like to receive the legacy of the heroes right now."

".....As you wish."

The prophet accepted Ark's decision without any arguing. Then the 10 jewels flew out of the slab and gathered on top of an altar. There was an intense light as the jewels combined into one. Then a shape gradually started to form like iron entering a furnace. After a while, the light disappeared and a sword was placed on top of the altar.

-Shining Darkness (Legendary)

Weapon: Two-handed sword

Attack: 55~65

Durability: 200/200

Weight: 80

User Restriction: Level 430 or more

A sword used by a hero who fought under Hero Maban. After fighting for three days and three nights against the demonic forces, the warrior was named a hero for his bravery.

This sword was made with a metal forged in the fires of hell for 100 years, Orichalcum and was a treasure of the demons.

But now that it is used by a hero, it changed to a sword of light with the ability to pierce the darkness. Just like its name, the Shining Darkness has special abilities that can be used when fighting the forces of darkness.

<Option: Damage +10% when fighting the demonic attribute, Agility +20, Stamina +20, Intelligence +20>

<Special Option (Shining Darkness):

A knockdown technique used against the demonic forces. In order for Shining Darkness to be activated, a certain amount of demonic monsters are needed. In order to use this skill, the sword needs to be charged with the demonic energy.

The subsequent explosion will overpower the darkness. The damage depends on the amount of demonic energy charged.

Mana consumption: 1,000 Cool down time: 1 hour>

‘A legendary sword!’

Ark’s eyes widened after he checked the information window. He had expected a lot from the equipment of the 100 heroes who played an active part in the Dark Century but the sword received was really beyond his imagination.

‘Amazing combat ability!’

The damage caused was 55~65! The base damage of the Promised Sword was 40~50 so it did 15 less damage. It also had the option attached of increasing the important stats such as agility, stamina and intelligence. And it also deals an extra 10% damage against demonic monsters. If was a sword worthy of being used on the front lines! Furthermore, there was also the Shining Darkness skill available.

'It is impossible to tell from the description how strong one of the techniques used by one of the 100 heroes is. It is clearly a skill that is specialized in fighting against demonic monsters.'

Ark didn't doubt the power of Shining Darkness. He had received a long awaited good item but there was one problem weighing on his mind. It was the Promised Sword. Ark had obtained 4 Hearthstones after much suffering and inserted it into the Promised Sword. With the various added bonuses, the damage of the Promised Sword was comparable to the Shining Darkness.

'I'll just switch between the Promised Sword and Shining Darkness and test which one can be utilized better. I will choose and sell the other one.'

One was a legendary sword which the other one had 3 rare Hearthstones and one unique Hearthstone inserted. No matter which one he sold, it would be possible to receive tens of millions of won for it. Ark collected the legendary sword and exited the hall. Lariette who was waiting outside then asked the prophets.

"Excuse me. Do you have the Ark of Creation stored here?"

The prophets flinched for the first time and looked at Lariette with shocked eyes.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"I heard it from a bishop of the Ares church not long ago in Selebrid. It was a holy relic that the 7 heroes used during the Dark Century to defeat the darkness. And this holy relic was stored in a sacred area called Shangri-La when the Dark Century ended. The name of that holy relic was the Ark of Creation. However, the bishop feared the advent of the Dark Century and asked me to find the Ark of Creation. Not long ago, I heard from the White Tiger clan that something similar to that was kept in Shangri-La. Wouldn't the object they talked about be the Ark of Creation?"

"A bishop requested it of you? Then you are? The descendant of Holy Knight Ronian.....?"

“I have received Ronian’s blessings and am the Innocence Knight Lariette.”

“Innocence Knight!”

The prophets were startled by Lariette’s answer. The prophets couldn’t hide their confusion as they approached.

“Yes, the ark kept in Shangri-La is the Ark of Creation. If you are truly the foreigner who inherited Holy Knight Ronian’s will then you have the right to the Ark of Creation. The Ark of Creation can either be used as a blessing by the Holy Knight or as a curse by the Ruin Knight. It is proof of God’s will that you arrived here first before the Ruin Knight. Then follow me.”

The prophet said and led her somewhere. Thus a huge change occurred to the continent and the dark war from this encounter.

Several days after Ark arrived at Shangri-La.....

“Ah, damn, why do you have to defend this place?”

“Yeah. The Lord of this territory shouldn’t just come and go as he pleases.”

The members of Dark Eden waiting on Silvana’s rampart stretched and complained. The whole continent was focused on the black obelisks and the demonic monsters that had attacked. Thanks to the martial law, sieges were forbidden so Nagaran was currently empty. But some members of Dark Eden still remained in Silvana. Some of the members of the coalition were still low levelled so Ark direction them to hunt in the secret dungeon. Therefore the Dark Eden members helped the Meow, raccoons, Wolrang and Eastern Nation level up in the secret dungeon.

“I would rather support the supply unit.”

The users would rather escort NPCs for money..... The users sighed as they thought about it.

Kuaaaaaah-!

A roaring sound suddenly came from the sky and there was a huge vibration. The coalition members reflexively raised their heads and turned pale. Something huge was approaching in the sky. It was a flying object resembling a huge stingray. The enormous skyray flapping its wings and bearing a castle on its back was the aerial fortress Rwigenberg.

“What the, that is?”

“Look over there, the stomach is opening!”

After arriving at Silvana, the stomach of Rwigenberg was opening to the sides. Then it poured out many black objects.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The hundreds of objects plunging into the estate were black obelisks. After the black obelisks plunged into the ground, it turned dark and demonic monsters started to crawl out. Hundreds of users riding gargoyles also flew out from Rwigenberg’s stomach and headed towards Silvana. The one leading the gargoyles was a knight in black armour.

“Ark, no matter how you try to escape you are still in the palm of my hand. We met unexpectedly last time so my preparations were negligent but this time it will be different. For the moment I will step on Silvana.”

The black knight with cold eyes was Alan. And the users who flew after him were from Andel’s ‘Avenger’ guild.

“Ark, come! This will be the site of our second battle!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The thousands of gargoyles started to attack Silvana's walls. Now that the continent was covered in darkness, Alan finally started sharpening his knife of revenge.

TO BE CONTINUED